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**Help or Hinder? : The Role of Alternative
Education for Young North Korean Refugees'
Integration into South Korean Society**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

원수진

Abstract

In the Korean peninsula, two Koreas have existed for more than 60 years after the Korean War (1950-53). North Koreans have escaped from their hometowns in order to overcome hunger and poverty since the mid-1990s. Although the numbers have dropped somewhat since Kim Jong-un became the leader of the North, people still cross the border, seeking a better life. The number of North Korean refugees residing in South Korea exceeded 30,000 as of 2016.

This study examines the role of alternative education for young North Korean refugees' integration into South Korean society, by exploring their experiences of alternative school in South Korea. Alternative schools for young North Korean refugees are a type of educational institution aiming to offer holistic support for the young refugees' successful adjustment to South Korean society. Although the number of those who cross the border and the type of migration has changed over time, children and young people are still considered to be the most vulnerable group who need special care. Young refugees have often endured extreme hardship and traumatic migration journeys before arriving in South Korea. They often arrive alone, without parents and in poor health, both physically and emotionally, and also face a variety of barriers to their integration into a new society. To help and support them better, therefore, this study aims to fill key gaps in knowledge about effective approaches to education for North Korean refugee students, focusing on the challenges and successes that young North Korean refugees experience in alternative school settings.

This study adopted a participatory approach based on the view of young people as social actors with their own voices. 12 young people from North Korea aged 17-27 participated in this study. All were current or recent students of three alternative schools in the city of Seoul, established to support young North Korean refugees. Their views were gathered using a visual method, Photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1997), and also one-to-one interviews. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the collected data.

The key findings of the study showed that the young North Korean refugees in these three alternative education settings experienced a holistic caring approach far beyond the general support offered in mainstream Korean schools. This study identified for the first time, four aspects to this holistic support: education, future career planning, accommodation, and physical and psychological well-being. The young people viewed their experiences as a process of preparation for becoming integrated into South Korean society as independent citizens. They saw alternative schools as helpful for them in overcoming the difficulties that they had faced previously, as well as those they were facing in the present. However, this study also revealed that although they formed close relationships with each other and had a great sense of belonging to their schools, they were also often frustrated by a lack of opportunities to mingle with South Korean peers and ‘be ordinary’. This frustration and wish to ‘be ordinary’ emerged as a strong theme in the study. Their frustration was balanced however by the high value they placed on the strong bonds developed in alternative education, noting how helpful these were in alleviating the effects of trauma. The study further uncovered, again for the first time, the many strategies the young people developed to overcome adversities and to adjust successfully to South Korean society.

On the basis of the young people’s experiences and views of alternative schools, this study raises important new questions about the role of South Korean alternative schools overall in the integration of young North Korean refugees into society, and for education for refugee children and young people more generally.

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I am heartily thankful to my family for their devoted love, prayers and support. My deepest thanks must go to my parents for having been always with me wherever I am and whatever I do. There are no suitable words that can express my gratitude.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents whom I love and respect.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The starting point for this study

My research interest in North Korean refugee children and young people was initially motivated by personal experience. I had an opportunity to volunteer with people who helped North Korean refugees, while working as a Korean language instructor in China between 2001 and 2002. At that time, a number of North Koreans were crossing the border into China to seek food because of severe famine in North Korea, sometimes swimming across the river or sometimes walking over the frozen river. My colleagues and I waited for North Koreans crossing the river and guided them to hide in a shelter. In winter, we made small balls with a sock, put money inside and threw them onto the frozen river. North Koreans hidden near the border area then came out from somewhere and took those socks. One day, I met two boys aged 9 and 13 years old in the border area. They had dark and drawn faces and wore worn-out clothes and shoes. They were guided to a shelter and stayed there with other children from North Korea. The two boys told us shocking stories from inside their hometown where there was a serious lack of food. It seemed to me that ‘well-being’ was a luxury and that all they could hope for was merely ‘being’, with the minimum amount of food. Several years later, I revisited the border area with young South Korean people as a member of a support programme for young North Korean refugees in Korea. Little had changed except for the addition of a long line of wire fence, constructed to prevent North Koreans from crossing the river into China. I stood facing the North, seeing a stark mountain, ruined factories, and strict border security over the wire fence. Even at night, there was no light visible in the North.

While meeting North Korean ‘river-crossers’ (as they are known in Korea), South Korean missionaries and activists working for them in China, and also educators of North Korean young refugees in South Korea, I heard a variety of dramatic stories of escape. I became increasingly concerned about the vulnerability of the children and young people involved. I also felt a kind of responsibility for those children and young people and started to think ‘what can I do for them “now” and “here”?’ These questions drove me to set up this PhD study.

Rationale for the study

The number of refugees from North Korea started to increase in the mid-1990s. The South Korean government accordingly enacted the North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act in 1997. In line with the increasing interest in North Korean refugees, a considerable amount of literature has been published on North Korean refugee children and young people. Most research has been published in Korean, and conducted on a range of topic areas, in particular traumatic experiences, social adjustment, welfare and education.

This previous research helps us to understand what young North Korean refugees experience during their migration and how this affects them. Children in North Korea often suffer problems with physical development, and they are often exposed to the risk of severe disease by malnutrition, resulting from economic difficulties and food shortages (Pak, 2010; Yoon, 2009). According to one research study, North Korean refugee children are around 3-4cm shorter and 1 kg lighter, on average, than South Korean peers (Schwekendiek and Pak, 2009). Another study on the growth status of North Korean refugee young people aged 12-24 reports that these young people are shorter by 4.9 to 10.8cm, and lighter from 6.0 to 12.5kg, than South Koreans of the same age (Choi et al., 2010).

These young people are also exposed to physical harm and psychological pain during the migration journey, for example, human trafficking or sexual abuse (Kang, 2005; Lee, 2011), death of parents or family break-ups (Choi et al., 2006; Won et al., 2015), and a sense of crisis and severe fear (Ahn, 2010). Accordingly, mental health issues are key topics in studies on young North Korean refugees, mostly addressing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety and stress (Emery et al., 2015; Jun et al., 2013; Kim, 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Lee and Lee, 2013; Lee et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2015; Shin and Kim, 2015; Son et al., 2010). Although there are some studies focusing on the strengths and potential of young refugees, such as resilience and post-traumatic growth (PTG) (Kim, 2013; Kim et al., 2015; Park, 2013; Yun and Oh, 2010), this is still an under-researched area.

Social and cultural adjustment is another significant issue examined in the large body of research about young North Korean refugees (Hong et al., 2010; Jin et al., 2013; Kim, 2013; Kim, 2010; Kim and Lee, 2013; Lee, 2002; Moon, 2005; Na, 2011; Park and Yoon, 2007). After entering South Korea, the young people encounter multidimensional challenges in the process of adaptation to a new society, such as social prejudice and discrimination (Um et al., 2015), social exclusion (Kim et al., 2015), communication problems due to language differences (Lee et al., 2011), cultural gaps (Kim, 2015), and deficiencies in education (Lee, 2007).

Schooling and education also emerge as key research areas. It is understandable that education and schooling, and social adjustment are main topic areas, in that most young refugees are likely to be school-going age and need to adjust to society as a newcomer. This focus on education is often related to three specific areas of interest: a) students in general school settings; b) students in alternative school settings; and c) young refugees missing out on school. These studies are largely related to academic engagement and achievement (Han et al., 2015; Jo et al., 2013; Kim, 2016), school subjects (Jung and Kim, 2015; Yang and Lee, 2012; Yeon and Kim, 2012), and school dropout (Kim, 2009; Kim and Yu, 2015). School adjustment is one of the main topics among research on schooling (Choi, 2014; Jeong, 2010; Kim, 2010; Kim, 2015; Kim and Jeong, 2011; Kwon, 2006; Lee, 2007; Shin and Kim, 2014). This issue of school adjustment is often addressed within a context of social adjustment. Lee et al. (2011) examine young refugees' adaptation to South Korean society, classifying it into social adjustment and school adjustment. Yoo et al. (2004) indicate that young North Korean refugees regard academic achievement as very important for their social adjustment to South Korea. According to Yang and Bae's (2010) study on the adaptation processes of young North Korean refugees in relation to school dropout, economic adaptation is inter-related with educational adaptation. This large body of research indicates the significance of schooling and education in the lives of young North Korean refugees in South Korea.

As has been seen so far, mental health issues related to trauma, social adjustment, and schooling and education are main topics in the studies about young North Korean refugees. It is difficult however to find research that explores these specific

areas of interest as part of trying to understand the whole experience of being a North Korean refugee in South Korea. In addition, North Korean refugee students tend to be described as a vulnerable and marginalised group who need special help and support. While it is, of course, important to bear in mind the vulnerability and issues of marginalisation in relation to this group, there is also much to learn about how they may develop a capacity to cope with difficult situations and to achieve success in school settings. It is, therefore, necessary to explore the school experiences of young North Korean refugees comprehensively, focusing not only on their vulnerability but also on their capacities and potential.

It is also worth noting that most of the existing studies focus on general school settings, while alternative education for young North Korean refugees has been an under-researched area thus far. Although those young people enrolled at alternative schools are identified as research participants in prior studies (Kim, 2017; Moon and Son, 2013; Park and Oh, 2011; Shin and Kim, 2014), only a few studies focus on alternative schooling itself, such as school programmes and systems (Kwon, 2006; Park, 2012) and teachers (Choi, 2016; Yoon, 2015). It is still hard to find research that explores young North Korean refugees' views and experiences of alternative education and the role of alternative schools for these young people's integration into a new society. The number of students enrolled at alternative schools is not large in itself. Nonetheless, it is significant in that more than one third of the total North Korean refugee students at high school level are involved in alternative schools, and those over school age mostly choose alternative education settings. These young people are highly likely to have significant and long-term needs in their academic performance, but also in the social and emotional aspects of their lives because of the traumatic experiences that they had during the migration process. It is, therefore, important to focus on alternative education in order to understand how to appropriately support these young people.

There are also significant gaps in the knowledge of young North Korean refugees' experiences of schools. As noted above, previous research largely addresses academic performance and school adjustment, focusing on general school settings. Going beyond this, we need to understand, in more depth and more broadly,

challenges and successes that young North Korean refugees experience in various school settings, in order to find a way to support these young people better and allow them to lead fulfilling lives. This is because they suffer from a great deal of trauma, and also because they are unlikely to do their best in Korean society which is very focused on academic performance. Furthermore, although there are a few studies focusing on the two topics of school and social adjustment and integration (Ro and Oh, 2017; Yoo et al., 2004), it has not been clearly explained how these sectors are connected and how they influence each other. Further investigation into the role of schools for young North Korean refugees' adjustment and integration is much needed.

To close a critical gap in research, this study explored young North Korean refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools, examining the role of alternative education for the young refugee's integration into South Korean society. By doing so, this study contributes to our knowledge about education for young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds, and it also aids our understanding of the particular role of alternative schools for these young people. It emphasises the necessity and importance of listening to young people and it helps deepen and extend understanding of the issues for young refugees in general. The findings aim to assist researchers in Korea and other East Asian countries where children and young people have often been viewed as passive and dependent beings, to understand the value and efficacy of research in which children and young people are viewed as social agents and active participants.

Throughout the thesis, documents and journal articles referenced here and accounts from all 12 participants were written in the Korean language. Therefore, all the Korean research materials needed to be translated into English. All translation from English to Korean was first performed by the researcher, and 'back translation' (Chen and Boore, 2010) was then carried out by working with a bilingual (Korean/English) translator in order to validate the researcher's initial translation. I also checked the accuracy of the translation of words or phrases by corresponding with the original authors of the documents and journal articles. The process of translation of the interview transcripts is given in chapter 3. It was sometimes

challenging to find equivalent expressions in English to certain Korean words or phrases. In these cases, I discussed and negotiated with the original authors and participants about the most appropriate meaning that they intended to convey.

Research questions

As noted above, my interest in the study of young North Korean refugees derives from my personal experience of working with North Korean refugees in China and Korea. My review of the literature also identified key gaps in knowledge about effective approaches to education for young North Korean refugees. This study, therefore, aims to fill the gaps in existing knowledge by discovering more about young North Korean refugees' experiences of alternative school. Little is known about the role of alternative education for North Korean refugee students, despite the key role it plays in offering support, and so this study also aims to understand more about this particular context. This study focuses on the challenges young North Korean refugees face but is also interested in learning about the way they develop a capacity for change and success along the way. By understanding young North Korean refugees' successes and challenges in more depth and more broadly, not only in terms of academic performance but also more holistically, this study examines the role of alternative schools play in the integration of young North Korean refugees into South Korean society. It seeks to find a way to help and support these young people with multi-faceted experiences and needs to become integrated into a new society.

The research is guided by these research questions:

- What are young North Korean refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools?
- How do they understand and experience challenges in their school settings?
- How do they understand and experience successes in their school settings?

- How does alternative school help or hinder their integration into South Korean society?

Structure of the thesis

This chapter has introduced the researcher's personal experiences of North Korean refugees as a motivation for the study and provided the rationale for the study with reference to the gaps in existing studies of young North Korean refugees; it has also established the study's aims and research questions.

Chapter 2 provides the context and background information for the study. It begins with a discussion of the use of the term 'refugee' for the study, arguing that 'refugee' is the most appropriate term to explain the traumatic experiences and unstable status that young people escaping from North Korea face in their home country and transit countries, and in South Korea as their arrival country. This chapter then briefly describes a history of the migration of North Korean refugees and factors driving them to cross the border, along with migration patterns over time. With this in mind, I summarise the support policies and programmes that the South Korean government implements and practices in relation to refugees from North Korea. This chapter then turns its attention to education for young North Korean refugees, including initial education at the first stage of settlement in South Korea.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and methods for the study. This chapter begins by first justifying the ontological, epistemological and methodological stance of this study, and then proceeds to provide the rationale for my choice of participatory research as an appropriate approach for this study, followed by the level and definition of 'participation' in the study. I go on to introduce Photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1997) and one-to-one interviews as a research tool for data collection. The overall research design for the fieldwork is illustrated after reviewing the practices of the pilot study. This chapter then turns to the overall procedure for data analysis, from recording the data to analysis using a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Attention then is given to trustworthiness and reflexivity, along with an introduction to the research ethics underlying the study at the end of this chapter.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the findings of the study. Chapter 4 is concerned with the methodological and ethical issues that I identified in my review of the literature and encountered throughout the study. I share the major challenges and practical issues that I faced and managed during the fieldwork, from accessing the research sites to conducting Photovoice with 12 young North Korean refugees. Extensive discussion is devoted to facilitators and barriers in listening to young people's voices in this study, including the researcher's reflections on the study. This chapter also pays special attention to ethical considerations that I addressed while working with young refugees.

Chapter 5 reports the findings and interpretations of the first research question about young North Korean refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools. The findings on the young refugees' school experiences were categorised into four areas of life: education, future career, accommodation and well-being. This approach to analysis is in line with 'means and markers of refugee integration', as suggested by Ager and Strang (2004; 2008). The young refugees also understood these school experiences as a process of preparation for becoming integrated into their new society as independent citizens. This chapter offers analysis of the young people's experiences and views of each of the four areas. Some findings associated with teachers at alternative schools are also unpacked in this chapter. Although this topic was not the main aim of this study, I became interested in this area because of what emerged from the data. It is worth exploring the role of teachers and the relations between teachers and students, in that, to a large extent, the experiences that the young refugees had at alternative schools were intertwined with their experiences of their teachers.

Chapter 6 examines the findings of the second and third research questions: the challenges and successes that young North Korean refugees experience and manage in alternative school settings. These were mostly focused on social and emotional issues. In alternative school settings, the young people experienced challenges due to a lack of opportunities to make natural friendships with South Korean peers and not feeling 'ordinary', while they had feelings of success when they had a strong sense of belonging to school and experienced social participation, such as voluntary work.

While trauma still influenced the young refugees' day-to-day lives, they tried to overcome the negative effects of trauma with their own strategies.

Chapter 7 offers a discussion of the key findings of the study. The discussion identifies four main themes extracted from the empirical findings: functional aspects of integration, social aspects of integration, trauma and coping strategies, and teachers at alternative schools. By so doing, this chapter seeks to answer the final research question about the role of alternative schools in young North Korean refugees' integration into South Korean society.

Chapter 8 outlines the conclusions of the study. This chapter begins with a summary of the main findings and arguments in relation to the research questions. It then goes on to suggest the contribution of the study to knowledge about education for young North Korean refugees, along with reflections on the limitations of the study. This chapter ends with recommendations for practice, policy and future research.

Chapter 2 Background to the study

Introduction

This chapter sets out the context for the study in theoretical, historical, cultural and policy terms. It begins with an introduction of key conceptual frameworks and terms for the current study and a brief history of North Korean migration and settlement in South Korean society. From there, I go on to explore South Korean education for refugee students from North Korea and then explain the alternative education sector in particular.

Key conceptual frameworks for the study

Although this study was not designed to be purely deductive in approach, it was informed by key conceptual frameworks related to children and young people as social agents, alternative education, integration and social capital.

Children and young people as active agents

The present study principally adheres to a view of children and young people as active agents in their own lives (James, 2007) and sees their voices as an important source of knowledge. This view of young people, as competent social actors, emerged as an alternative to more traditional Korean views of young people as passive and dependent beings. The work of Tisdall and Punch (2012) helped inform the methodology of the current study, with their support of a ‘new’ perspective on children and young people, focusing on research ‘with’ young North Korean refugees, ethical issues, and innovative research methods, and young people as active participants in the research process.

Tisdall and Punch (2012) introduce a notion of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ agency, as suggested by Klocker (2007, p.85):

... ‘thin’ agency refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterized by few viable alternatives. ‘Thick’ agency is having the latitude to act within a broad range of options.

It is possible for a person's agency to be 'thickened' or 'thinned' over time and space, and across their various relationships. Structures, contexts, and relationships can act as 'thinners' or 'thickeners' of individual's agency, by constraining or expanding their range of viable choices.

Although this study did not explicitly address 'agency', much of the discussion that follows from the findings relates to ideas about the tension between structure and agency: 'the tensions between recognising children and young people's agency versus acknowledging their position of vulnerability in a context of extreme structural constraints' (Tisdall and Punch, 2012, p.256).

Alternative school

Taking into consideration that this study was conducted in alternative school settings, it is necessary to consider the meaning of the term 'alternative'. In the Korean context, the term 'alternative school' first started to be used in the 1990s, including the critical views of mainstream schools and their lack of diversity in education. It is apparent that the meaning of 'alternative' here is close to in 'contrast with public education and formal schooling' (Shin and Nho, 2007, cited in Yoon and Kim, 2018, p.37). This use of the term 'alternative' is widely related to accommodating students who reject or are rejected by mainstream schools and replacing educational approaches in mainstream school settings. In a similar way, Kraftl (2013, p.2) provides his working definition of 'alternative':

'alternative' educational approaches are those that are not administered, controlled and/or predominantly funded through the state-sanctioned educational programmes assumed to be the 'mainstream' in countries where education is an assumed, universal right for children.

As the notion of alternative education encompasses a diversity of forms of schools and educational approaches, not only for marginalised young people and students with special needs, but also for middle-class students who seek 'distinguished' educational engagement in a paying-fee school, McGregor et al. (2017) distinguish new educational approaches for marginalised young people from the general use of the term 'alternative' above by adopting the term 'unconventional'. Regardless of

school types, there are common values that alternative schools seek, as noted by Mills and McCluskey (2018, p.1): ‘personalized learning, small classes and small school rolls, student choice, voice and agency, active engagement in learning, informal relationships between teacher and student, and flexible, local systems of governance’. In light of the general notion of the term ‘alternative’ and common features of alternative schools, the findings of the study, as presented in chapter 5, lead us to establish the common features and distinctive differences between alternative schools for young North Korean refugees and other types of alternative schools.

Integration

The central aim of this study examines the role of alternative school in the integration of young North Korean refugees into South Korean society. This study borrows from Castles et al and their understanding of integration as ‘the process of becoming part of a new society’ (Castles et al., 2002, p.12). However, the ways of defining the term differ widely and the context in which the term is used varies, as integration occurs in different places and domains in different ways. The authors continue to argue that the concept of integration also receives criticism from grassroots organisations who argue that it is a top-down term and thus, is not used voluntarily by the community sector. Instead of the term ‘integration’, some social scientists suggest the use of the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘participation’. Inclusion is, as the opposite concept of exclusion or social exclusion, ‘the process whereby immigrants or refugees become participants in particular subsectors of society’ (Castle et al., 2002, p.16). This term is, however, seen to be as vague and broad as integration. In Korea, the two terms ‘integration’ and ‘inclusion’ are used interchangeably, being chiefly translated as the same word. Participation is also linked to refugees’ access to subsectors, placing more focus on their active role (Castle et al., 2002).

A considerable amount of Korean research on North Korean refugees’ integration adopt Berry’s (1997) acculturation model, in which the terms ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’ are distinguished on the basis of ‘cultural maintenance’ and

intercultural contact. That is, the term integration means when the newcomers maintain their own cultural identity and at the same time seek contact with people outside their own group. To use the term integration more explicitly, the current study employs two usages of the term as a one-way process and a two-way process of integration. The latter characterises mutual changes and adaptation between newcomers and members of the host society, while the former implies that immigrants are required to fit in with the new culture and social patterns as a one-way process of adaptation, similar to 'assimilation'. Focusing more on refugee integration, Ager and Strang's (2004; 2008) framework of refugee integration and its applied study (Atfield et al., 2007) is adopted to discuss the role of alternative schools for the integration of young North Korean refugees (see Figure 7.2). Although this view of integration respects young refugees' cultural diversity and provides equal opportunity, most research on North Korean refugees still tends to have a limited view of integration (see chapter 1), in that the perspective of minority versus majority groups exists, focusing on reducing the prejudice of the minority. Taking into consideration the findings of the present study in which participants had a view of integration that they needed to adjust to the unchanged culture of the society, it seems that the discussion on integration is still at an early stage in Korean society. Most recently, there is an emerging trend to reconsider the concept of integration 'in an era of super-diversity' (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore, 2018), where the existing concept of integration is less likely to work properly in understanding new patterns and transitions of migration where 'not all migrants settle permanently, or maintain close connections to more than one country' and 'relations are often sustained by new communication technologies which can enable synchronised social relations to endure back home and also offer the potential for new spatially unspecific relationships to emerge' (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore, 2018, p.186).

This study has a discussion on integration on the basis of a somewhat traditional and structural concept of integration premised on the idea that minor migrants permanently settle in a new society where there is major population of the host country. It would therefore be worth conducting further research into the new

emerging concept of integration in the future, taking into account the changes of migration of North Korean refugees over time.

Social capital

In the context of integration, this study also examines social connections and relationships of young North Korean refugees in alternative school settings. To do this, the concept of social capital was drawn on for the study. This has been developed in the past few decades and three principal theorists – Bourdieu (1977), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993) – are mentioned as ‘founding fathers’ of social capital (McGonigal et al., 2007). Social capital may be an important framework for understanding young refugees’ lives in a new society, as social capital is more likely to be the only useful form of capital available to refugees arriving in a new country due to the loss of financial and human capital by leaving their home countries (Lamba and Krahn, 2003).

This study adopted Putnam’s concept of social capital, defined as the ‘features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’ (Putnam, 1996, p.56). This concept has three aspects depending on the process of social capital formation: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. These are also featured as ‘intra-community, inter-community, and community-public agency’ because social capital is invested in and shared ‘within’ and ‘between’ communities (Zetter et al., 2006, p.9). Bonding social capital is characterised as strong connections within a similar ethnic group, while bridging social capital is formed as ‘looser connections’ between diverse groups. Linking social capital is regarded as the connections to state structures and institutions (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014).

As the relationship between people and their social networks offer ‘the invisible glue holding society together’ (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014, p.101), Putnam’s concept of social capital has been widely used in the context of refugee integration and social cohesion, such as Ager and Strang’s (2004; 2008) refugee integration model, adopted for the study (see chapter 7). While Putnam’s concept helps the present study

conceptualise the community level of the connections of young North Korean refugees (Campbell, 2001), it is also important to bear in mind that the tendency of ‘the idealisation of community solidarity’ inherent in the social capital concept may result in undermining the complexity of the community (Zetter et al., 2006).

Use of the term ‘refugee’ in the study

Before looking at the details of the migration and settlement of North Korean refugees, I first consider the use of the term ‘refugee’ in the study. In official Korean documents the term ‘refugee’ is mainly used to refer to a person who escaped from North Korea and settled in South Korea, although there does not seem to be a consensus on the use of the terms, even among Korean domestic researchers and official documents, or research papers published by the state.

North Korean refugees are defined through the term ‘*buk-han ital ju-min*’ in Article 2 of the North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act, meaning ‘residents escaping from North Korea’:

The term “residents escaping from North Korea” means persons who have their residence, lineal ascendants and descendants, spouses, workplaces, etc. in the area north of the Military Demarcation Line, and who have not acquired any foreign nationality after escaping from North Korea (Ministry of Government Legislation, 2017).

In line with the definition and the official use of the English term ‘refugee’ by the state, I also use ‘refugee’ throughout this thesis. In existing literature, people who have escaped from North Korea and who have settled in South Korea are referred to by a range of terms, depending on the authors’ academic views, research intentions or main arguments. Examples of such include: ‘defectors’ (Choi et al., 2010; Jue and Kim, 2014; Kim et al., 2017), ‘settlers’ (Kim, 2016), ‘migrants’ (Lee, 2011; Park, 2012), ‘dislocated North Koreans’ (Lee and Ahn, 2016), ‘escapees’ (Kang and Chae, 2015), ‘withdrawal residents’ (Choi, 2014) and ‘refugees’ (Im, 2015; Lee, 2014; Pak, 2010). For example, Kim (2009) uses the term ‘immigrant’ for a person obtaining South Korean citizenship and settling in South Korea, and uses the term ‘newcomers’ for young people newly arrived in South Korea, instead of ‘refugee’. By doing this,

she tries to distinguish North Koreans' experiences inside South Korea from those outside South Korea, and to emphasise the neutral meaning of their status.

While North Korean people in South Korea are referred to as refugees by the state, they need to be distinguished from other refugee populations. This is because North Korean refugees receive special help and support under the North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act in South Korea, which is separate from the relevant laws for other immigrants. The legal situation of North Korea is complex: North Korea is regarded as an independent country by the United Nations (Lee, 2006), but South Korean domestic law states that 'the territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean peninsula and its adjacent islands' (Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea (Ministry of Government Legislation, 2015)). Legally, South Korea still views North Korea as a part of the territory of the country, not as an independent country (Choi, 2014). From this perspective, it seems appropriate to view those people from North Korea as residents withdrawn from the North rather than refugees.

However, in my view, it is necessary here to consider their migration experiences and legal status in transit countries. Currently, it is almost impossible for North Koreans to enter South Korea directly over the border between the South and the North, namely the ceasefire line called the Military Demarcation Line (MDL). They therefore have no choice but to cross the river into China. However, North Koreans escaping to China are regarded as illegal border-crossers (Chan and Schloenhardt, 2007) and accordingly, become 'stateless'. For diplomatic reasons, it is difficult for the South Korean government to take explicit actions to help protect them in China. Therefore, it is still difficult for those people to gain proper protection and support during their migration.

Taking into account this complicated situation for North Korean border-crossers, this study employs the term 'refugee'. This recognises the complexity and trauma associated with North Korean people's experiences in escaping from North Korea, becoming stateless in China and other countries, becoming asylum seekers in a transit country, and entering and settling in South Korea. It would therefore make

sense that they are called refugees, although the term may cause North Korean refugees to feel discriminated against and labelled (Kim, 2009).

It is also necessary to consider the international perspective: North Koreans who have fled from their country meet the definition of a refugee according to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees;

... a refugee is a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011, p.3)

Although North Korean refugees leave their country for a range of reasons, including economic reasons, such as seeking employment, as well as family reunification and a better future for their children (Kim, 2014; Lee, 2013), they are not protected properly by their own government while out of the country. Rather, they are highly likely to face persecution when forced to return to North Korea. This study therefore argues that it seems proper that those who have fled from North Korea are defined as refugees rather than migrants.

Refugees from North Korea: Patterns and trends over time

To understand the current situation for North Korean refugees, it is necessary to trace the history back to the early twentieth century. After Japanese colonisation of the Korean peninsula came to an end in 1945, the South and the North established different governments, divided by different ideologies. The Korean peninsula was then divided by the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) at the end of the Korean War, by a cease-fire agreement (1950-53). While the South was established on the basis of liberal democracy and capitalism, the North developed the *Juche* ideology; a kind of military socialism. The official names of the two Koreas are the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), but 'South Korea' and 'North Korea' are often used conventionally instead of the official names.

The earliest North Korean refugees were mostly North Korean soldiers. They defected from North Korea, crossing the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) between the two Koreas. They were mostly driven by anti-socialism and the media described them as a symbol of the victory of South Korea over the North (Kim, 2012). With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many of the North Korean elite escaped from their country during this period (Yoon, 2009). The mass exodus of ordinary people started in the mid-1990s, due to the death of Kim Il-sung in 1994 and a disastrous flood in North Korea in 1995 (Park, 2005). Migration consequently faced a turning-point in the following respects: a) the type of border-crossers had changed from adult males to adult females and children; b) the region of origin had expanded from border areas to the whole area of North Korea; c) the main driving factor had changed from food shortages to general economic problems (Lee, 2013; Yoon, 2002). Since the 2000s, there had been increasing numbers of North Koreans escaping from the country in family units, largely through migration brokers. Chain migration by family members was also identified during this period (Lee, 2013); that is, family members who had already settled in South Korea leading to other members of the family and relatives still residing in North Korea to escape from the home country.

Recently, the factors and aspects of migration have diversified further, for example, due to wanting to give children a better life, or due to an influx of information into North Korea (Kim, 2014). Information from the outside world is largely introduced by North Korean refugee-relatives, NGOs or private organisations. It is reported that North Korean refugees play an important role in an interchange of information as a connector between the two Koreas. They introduce South Korean culture, such as K-pop music or Korean TV series and movies to their family and relatives residing in North Korea. They also send US dollars and electronic devices, such as mobile phones or CD/MP3 players. These changes have exposed North Koreans to knowing more about the outside world whilst also promoting a more positive view of South Korea (Kim, 2014). Most recently, there has been a new trend in migration, with some North Korean parents sending their adolescent children to South Korea for their education. As most of the parents are party officials in high-ranking positions, they can support their children on the basis of power and wealth that they possess in

North Korea, for example, by sending US dollars regularly to cover the cost of living for their children residing in South Korea (Lee, 2018).

Refugees from North Korea generally use routes crossing the border into China and passing through other South-East Asian countries before entering South Korea, as shown in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 Migration route (Ministry of Education, 2017)



Crossing the border itself presents major practical challenges because they need to cross a river and pass through military guard posts near the border. As noted previously, since North Korean migrants are regarded as illegal border-crossers in China, they are unlikely to be protected properly and find a way of entering South Korea directly. They may face serious human rights abuses, such as arrest, persecution, torture, political prison camps or public execution while in China or when being captured in China and forcibly sent back to North Korea (Cho, 2010). China joined the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (Chan and Schloenhardt, 2007). However, the Chinese government still returns the border-crossers to North Korea (Ji, 2011) on the legal basis of a number of agreements: the Mutual Agreement for the Exchange of Escapees or Criminals between North Korea and China (Extradition Agreement),

entered into in 1960; the Mutual Cooperation Protocol for the Work of Maintaining National Security and Social Order in the Border Areas, entered into in 1986; and the Regulation of Jilin Province on Frontier Administration, enacted in 1993 (Chung et al., 2015).

Although this has provided a legal basis for the Chinese government to deport North Korean border-crossers back to their home country, regarding them as illegal immigrants, some (Cho, 2010; Han, 2013; Neaderland, 2004) argue that the Chinese government should comply with the United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and not forcibly return North Korean refugees, because the multilateral agreements, such as the Refugee Convention, override the bilateral agreement between China and North Korea.

In this difficult situation, once North Koreans cross the border into China, they often try to reach South Korea through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, or sometimes via Mongolia. Around 75 and 85 per cent of North Koreans entering South Korea came through South-East Asian countries in 2008 and 2009 respectively. They are mostly smuggled through these countries and then reach South Korea or other foreign embassies with the help of missionaries from religious institutions, advocacy groups and NGOs, or by paying brokers. These escape routes vary, taking account of changing situations in these transit countries, such as their diplomatic or trade relations with each of the two Koreas (Do et al., 2015; Song, 2013). While, in the past, young North Korean refugees tended to stay in transit countries for a relatively long period of time before arriving in South Korea, there has recently been an increase in the number of North Korean refugees entering South Korea as a family unit within a shorter period of time (Kang et al., 2017).

According to the official statistics by the state, the number of North Korean refugees entering South Korea stood at 30,212, as of December 2016 (Ministry of Unification, 2017). This accounts for approximately 0.06 per cent of the entire South Korean population. While North Korean refugees are not that large in number for South Korea, in light of the current population of North Korea, one per 800 North Koreans escape from their home country (Lee, 2018; Statistics Korea, 2018).

Table 2.1 Number of North Korean refugees in South Korea by year
(Ministry of Unification, 2017)

Classification	98	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08
Male	831	565	510	474	626	424	515	573	608
Female	116	478	632	811	1,272	960	1,513	1,981	2,195
Total	947	1,043	1,142	1,285	1,898	1,384	2,028	2,554	2,803
Classification	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
Male	662	591	795	404	369	305	251	302	8,802
Female	2,252	1,811	1,911	1,098	1,145	1,092	1,025	1,116	21,410
Total	2,914	2,402	2,706	1,502	1,514	1,397	1,276	1,418	30,212

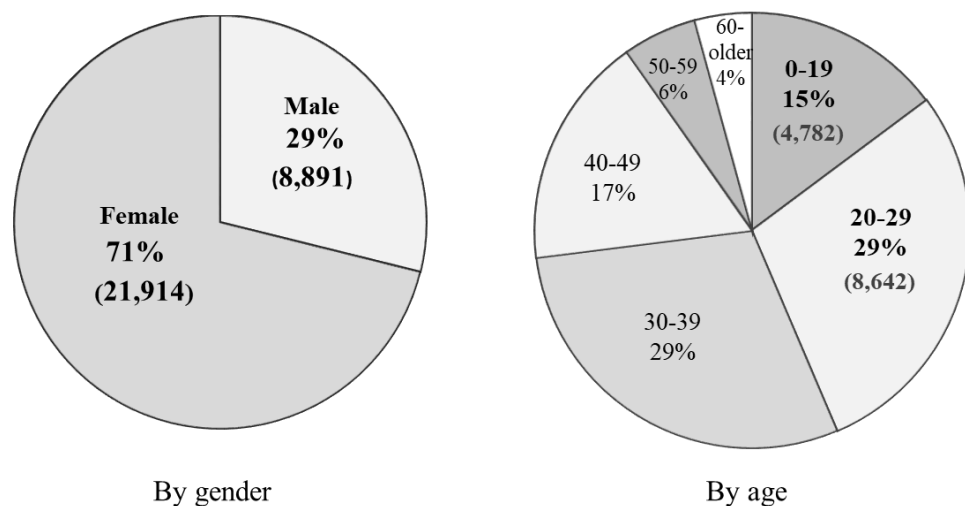
As shown in Table 2.1, the figures have increased steadily from 1998 to 2011, reaching the highest point at 2,914 in 2009. This, however, went down sharply to 1,502 in 2012, when Kim Jong-un was officially declared supreme leader in North Korea. He became North Korea's new leader by the hereditary transfer of power to a third generation of the Kim family. After this, the border security between North Korea and China was strengthened by the governments of both countries. Since then, the number of refugees from North Korea has been on the decrease gradually, although there was a slight increase in 2016.

It seems notable that the percentage of women has risen steadily since 2002 and accounted for approximately 71 per cent of North Korean refugees, as of December 2016. This may be triggered by the system of food distribution in North Korea; food is distributed to each family through the 'father', who is regarded as the head of the household. Food rations, therefore, would cease and police investigations would ensue if a father's absence becomes known to the authorities (Ministry of Unification, 2014). Instead, mothers or female siblings cross the border into China to overcome poverty. The problem is that those female border-crossers are highly likely to be exposed to dangerous situations, such as human trafficking or forced marriage to old single farmers or disabled men in rural Chinese areas (Baek, 2002; Do et al., 2016).

In addition, as the number of North Korean women crossing the border into China has increased, children who are born in transit countries have also been on the rise.

These children are mostly born in China to North Korean mothers and Chinese fathers, and enter South Korea with their mothers. Recently, the number of those children has begun to outnumber North Korean born children in South Korean general school settings (Ministry of Education, 2016). Some of them, unfortunately, do not know their fathers, because they were born as a result of rape in the migration journey. It would be hard to estimate the exact numbers of those children because they are mostly placed under stateless status in China, due to not receiving official birth certificates from the Chinese government. Despite the increasing number of this group, there have been a limited number of studies on this issue to date. Future studies on this group of children and young people are therefore recommended in order to provide suitable support for them.

Figure 2.2 Demographic statistics of North Korean refugees residing in South Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2017)



Looking at the demographic statistics of North Korean refugees in South Korea in Figure 2.2, the percentage of young refugees aged 0-29 was 44 per cent of the total population of North Korean refugees residing in South Korea, as of June 2017. Generally, young refugees in both age categories (aged 0-19 and 20-29) are in childcare and education, including both formal and informal sectors. A detailed discussion of educational issues for young North Korean refugees is provided in the next section.

As noted earlier, the heterogeneity between the two Koreas has existed in political, economic and social systems since the Korean War (1950-53). South Korea was developed as a liberal democracy and market economy, while North Korea was developed on the basis of the *Juche* (meaning ‘self-reliance’) ideology¹ (Lim and Jung, 1999). There are also cultural and linguistic differences due to the division and isolation over the last 60 years, even though the two Koreas have the same ethnic roots. Therefore, it may be said that the two Koreas are the same, but not the same. One of the marked differences may be in relation to the use of language. Although the two Koreas speak the same language, the difference in vocabulary has grown over time. It is widely known in South Korea that language is used as a means of strengthening the ideology of socialism in North Korea. A range of words related to war, army and Kim Il-sung, who is idolised as the founder of the communist regime in North Korea, are often used in the contexts of education, but also in day-to-day life (Moon, 2004). Most words based on Chinese or other foreign languages have also been changed into the native language by the Korean-only policy since the 1960s (Ko, 2013). On the other hand, in South Korea, foreign words, mostly based on Chinese and English, now account for a substantial proportion of commonly used language, reflecting the social changes of an industrialised and globalised society (Kang, 2011). This language difference is one of many issues for young North Korean refugees in adapting to South Korean society and understanding academic material in school settings.

Settlement support for North Korean refugees

North Korean asylum seekers are allowed to choose any Western country, not just South Korea, for their application. The South Korean government has adhered to the principle of protecting and accommodating all those who choose to enter South Korea. Once they arrive in South Korea, the government helps them to adapt to

¹ *Juche* ideology is a modified socialism established in North Korea. *Juche* is a Korean word that broadly means ‘self’ or ‘subject’. This denotes a modified practice of Marxism and Leninism in the unique context of North Korean culture and politics, strongly emphasising self-reliance and independence (Reed, 1997, p.169).

South Korean society by offering various basic benefits and supporting programmes. The settlement support process is outlined in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Settlement support process for North Korean refugees
(Ministry of Unification, 2016)

Request for protection and transfer to South Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon request for protection, report and notify the situation to appropriate government agencies • Accommodate refugees² in foreign diplomatic offices or temporary shelters in a host country • Negotiate with the host country and support the immigration of refugees after verifying their identity
Protection Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon entrance, conduct joint questioning with appropriate government agencies, including the National Intelligence Service • After questioning, transfer refugees to the custody of Hanawon, the education centre for social adaptation
Decision over protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide whether to grant the refugees protection through deliberation by the Consultative Council to Deal with Dislocated North Koreans
Hanawon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct training for social adaptation (12 weeks, 392 hours) - Psychological well-being, better understanding of South Korean society, and basic vocational training, etc. • Transfer refugees to their residence after registration of family relations, arrangement of housing
Residence support (five years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational support: vocational training, employment incentive, employment subsidy, etc. • Asset-building: Future Happiness Bankbook • Educational support: Special admission and transfer to schools and support for tuition • Social Security: Apply for basic livelihood security for special cases • Support workers system: community services (local governments), employment (employment centres), and personal protection (police stations) • Public-private cooperation: operate 111 regional councils to support North Korean refugees • Korea Hana Foundation: provide comprehensive services to North Korean refugees

² As noted above, the terms ‘defector’ and ‘refugee’ are used interchangeably in publications by the Ministry of Unification. Although the table of settlement support process is derived from the White Paper on Korean Unification 2016, which uses the term ‘defector’ in the original table, this study uses the term ‘refugee’ instead of ‘defector’ throughout this paper.

Non-governmental participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate and operate 29 regional adaptation centres providing information on everyday life, psychological and career counselling services, and training to help refugees adapt to their communities • Manage volunteer settlement helpers (518 persons) • Professional counsellors for North Korean defectors (87 persons) provide professional counselling services
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Once North Korean refugees enter South Korea, they are required to participate in a 12-week (392 hours) social orientation programme at Hanawon, which is the education centre for social adaptation of North Korean refugees, after a process of ‘joint questioning’ by relevant government agencies, as seen in Table 2.2. This orientation programme aims to help North Korean refugees to: a) regain emotional stability; b) overcome cultural shock; and c) find motivation to become socially and economically independent so that they will settle effectively (Ministry of Unification, 2016). The details of the programmes are outlined in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 Social orientation programme (Ministry of Unification, 2016)



For children and young people, educational support programmes are initiated at Hanawon. This is discussed in more detail below.

Education for North Korean refugee students

The Ministry of Education in South Korea offers educational support to North Korean refugee students. Children and young people under the age of 24 years, who have been admitted or transferred to a high school or below, are eligible for educational support by the state (Ministry of Unification, 2014). Young North Korean refugees (*tal-buk-cheong-so-nyun* in Korean) are described as ‘North Korean refugees aged between six to 24 who were born in North Korea and currently are residing in South Korea’ (Ministry of Education, 2017). Children and young people born in China or other countries are also entitled to receive educational support, if one of their parents has North Korean refugee status in South Korea. They are not officially designated as young North Korean refugees (Ministry of Education, 2017), but the term *tal-buk-cheong-so-nyun* (meaning ‘young North Korean refugees’) is used widely for all young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds, regardless of their birth place. When these young people are enrolled in South Korean mainstream school settings, they are called North Korean refugee students (*tal-buk-hak-saeng* in Korean). The wide range of ages from six to 24 is intended to ensure continuing educational support for North Korean refugee students, whilst also acknowledging the severity of the gaps in their learning (Kwak et al., 2014). Finally, the group of children and young people born in South Korea to members of North Korean refugee families are not regarded as refugees and so do not receive any special support by the state, even though their parents have North Korean refugee status. The terms and support types are categorised as seen in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Categorisation of young North Korean refugees (Kwak et al., 2014)

Classification	North Korean young refugees	North Korean refugee students		Children of North Korean refugee parents
Notion	A comprehensive term indicating those of children and youth age among North Korean refugees	North Korean refugee youth born in North Korea and currently enrolled in South Korean regular school settings	Students a) born in China or other countries, b) currently enrolled in regular schools, and c) one of the parents is a North Korean refugee	Children born a) in South Korea and b) as a member of a North Korean refugee family
Age range	6-24	-		
Special admission	Applicable		Not applicable	
Tuition subsidies				
Support by educational offices	Applicable (only enrolled in school)	Applicable		Not applicable (in principle)

Strictly speaking, young North Korean refugees in alternative education settings do not belong to the category of ‘North Korean refugee students’ according to the official classification by the state as seen in Table 2.3. In the official statistics of South Korean schools, however, young people enrolled in alternative schools (only for state-accredited schools) are also regarded as a group of ‘students’ in school settings. It is therefore understandable that all the young people involved in school settings are generally called ‘North Korean refugee students’ regardless of which school type they belong to, whether a general or alternative school, even though they are entitled to different levels of support. At this point, it is also necessary to think more about the way young North Korean refugees are categorised and given specific labels. While this is, of course, an effective approach to provide appropriate support from the viewpoint of the authorities, it may cause those young people to feel discriminated or stigmatised. In this study, participants reported that this way of labelling ‘students’ was one of the challenging situations that they experienced in alternative school settings. Therefore, this study suggests that support policies for

young North Korean refugees need to be reviewed and implemented from the perspective of young North Korean refugees who are subject to the policies, as well as South Korean policy makers.

The recent figures available suggest that the total number of North Korean refugee students in Korean Ministry of Education schools stands at 2,764 and the number of students enrolled in alternative schools at 226 (Ministry of Education, 2017). Although the number itself of young North Korean refugees attending alternative schools is small, it is worth focusing on this group of students as their needs are of a higher level.

Table 2.4 Number of North Korean refugee students in school settings
(Ministry of Education, 2017)

Classification	General school						Alternative School	Total
	Elementary		Middle		High			
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Students (number)	524	503	354	372	372	413	226	2,764
	1,027		726		785			
	2,538							

The ratio of males and females is almost equal and the number of female students is slightly more than male students in middle and high schools, while more male students are enrolled in elementary schools in Table 2.4. Meanwhile, the number of students born in China or other countries has increased gradually since 2011 and for the first time in 2015 exceeded the number of refugee students born in North Korea having crossed the border, as seen in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 North Korean refugee students enrolled in general schools by the country of origin (Ministry of Education, 2017)

Classification	Students (number, (%))			Total
	Elementary	Middle	High	
North Korea	361(35.1%)	332(45.7%)	408(52.0%)	1,101(43.4%)
China or other countries	666(64.9%)	394(54.3%)	377(48.0%)	1,437(56.6%)
Total	1,027(100%)	726(100%)	785(100%)	2,538(100%)

According to research, students born in China and other countries differ in some ways from students from North Korea. Most of these students tend to be poor at the Korean language or even speak only Chinese (Han, 2015; Kim, 2017). Moreover, taking into account their status, that most were born to a North Korean mother and Chinese father, due to human trafficking or a purchased marriage (Park et al., 2011), they are likely to have been exposed to very unstable situations and poverty in China or other transit countries and often excluded from educational support by the state in South Korea, as previously seen in Table 2.3. Therefore, they may have another reason for being disadvantaged in education and settlement, compared to refugee students from North Korea. Future research on this topic is recommended to offer proper support for these students.

Another key point is that more than half of North Korean refugee students are enrolled in mainstream schools located in the capital region: in Seoul (25.7%), Gyeong-gi (29.3%), and Incheon (10.4%), as of April 2015 (Kim et al., 2015). This is not limited to general school settings. Most alternative schools are also located in these areas. In particular, 91.1 per cent of general schools in which North Korean refugee students are enrolled have only less than five North Korean refugee students. This means that it is highly likely that there will be only one student with a North Korean refugee background in a class and this may therefore put those students in a marginalised situation.

In Table 2.4 above, the number of students at an alternative school includes only those students enrolled in state-accredited schools. In fact, the number of North Korean young refugees involved in alternative education is higher, including the number of students in non-accredited schools. Alternative schools are classified as state-accredited schools and non-accredited schools. The latter cannot be accredited academically, and students in non-accredited schools must therefore take a qualification exam equivalent to a school diploma, while students in state-accredited schools can obtain a high school diploma. As of 2015, it is estimated that there are approximately 340 students in two state-accredited schools and six non-accredited schools (Kim et al., 2015). It is estimated however that there are more students

involved in alternative education institutions, including the hidden numbers of students involved in the whole sectors of alternative education.

Initial education in South Korea

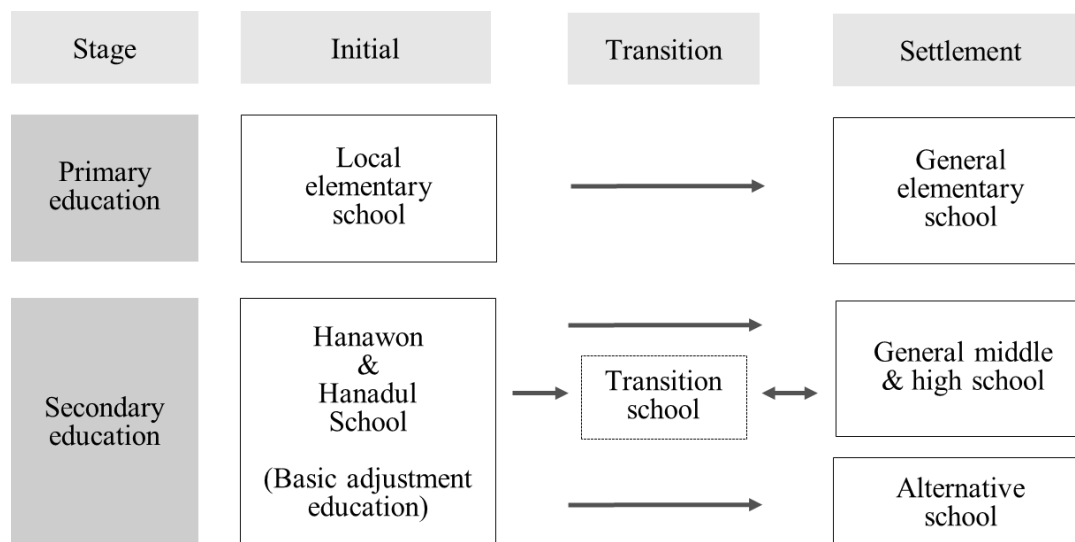
As previously noted, once young North Korean refugees enter South Korea, they are required to participate in a 12-week (392 hours) social orientation programme at Hanawon, which is the state education centre for refugees from North Korea. During this period, North Korean refugee children and young people up to 24 years of age participate in educational programmes at a school affiliated to Hanawon, named Hanadul School. The young refugees are placed into one kindergarten class, two elementary school classes and three secondary school classes, according to their age, academic achievement and previous educational experiences. While young people are provided with full-time education at Hanadul School, children allocated in kindergarten and elementary school age receive commissioned education at a local elementary school and a kindergarten attached to the school near Hanawon. Those children have some time in an inclusive class with South Korean peers and the remainder of the time in a special class with children only from North Korean refugee backgrounds. It is at this stage that refugee students may first meet their South Korean peers. Hanadul School provides a three-month course covering basic subjects but also offers psychological counselling, career counselling and a class which offers insights into understanding South Korean society. During this period, prior educational achievement in North Korea is reviewed on the legal basis of the Enforcement Decree of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Kim et al., 2015). They are then transferred to general schools or choose alternative educational provision.

Transfer to general school or to alternative school

After the initial education at Hanawon, students can choose to either enrol in mainstream schools or opt for alternative education. Elementary school students mostly tend to be transferred to local schools close to where they are housed and young people at the level of secondary school are able to choose to go to one of three

types of school: a) a transition school, b) a general school, or c) an alternative school (Han et al., 2010).

Figure 2.4 Flow of education for North Korean refugee children and young people (Kim et al., 2015)



As seen in Figure 2.4, there is a transition school for secondary school students, established in 2006, aiming to help North Korean young people adjust successfully to a new school environment in South Korea. The South Korean government has provided North Korean refugee students with a variety of educational support. North Korean refugee students in general school settings are exempt from admission fees, tuition fees, school operation fees and boarding fees, pursuant to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in South Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2016). In addition to this financial assistance, there are other support programmes for enhancing North Korean refugee students' adaptation to general schools, such as school coordinators for those students, providing one-to-one mentoring programmes, and special units for students from North Korean refugee backgrounds. Career counselling programmes and vocational education are also offered for students at secondary schools (Kim et al., 2015). However, there is little research exploring students' experiences and views of these support programmes offered by the state. There is also a lack of research into North Korean refugee young people's experiences of alternative schools. Further research is therefore required to listen to their views and experiences in order to

develop more helpful programmes and policies for students from North Korean refugee backgrounds.

School dropout of North Korean refugee students

As of 2015, statistics show that the school dropout rate of North Korean refugee students is on the decrease, as seen in Table 2.6. Nonetheless, there still exist several difficulties adapting to the school environment. According to the North Korean Refugees Foundation (2012), the most difficult problems at school are ‘catching up with class’ (52.6%), ‘cultural adaptation and language’ (13.5%) and ‘friends’ (8.5%). A lack of family support is also known to be one of the challenges that North Korean refugee students face in studying at general schools (Kang et al., 2017).

Table 2.6 Comparison of school dropout rate (Ministry of Education, 2016)

School Year	Elementary		Middle		High		Total (%)	
	Others	NKRS	Others	NKRS	Others	NKRS	Others	NKRS
2010	0.6	0.9	1.0	8.5	2.0	9.1	1.1	4.9
2011	0.6	2.5	0.9	4.4	1.9	10.1	1.1	4.7
2012	0.6	2.6	0.9	3.8	1.8	4.8	1.0	3.3
2013	0.6	3.1	0.8	7.4	1.6	1.6	0.9	3.5
2014	0.5	0.6	0.7	3.1	1.4	7.5	0.8	2.5
2015	0.5	0.2	0.6	2.9	1.3	7.3	0.8	2.2
2016	0.6	0.6	0.6	2.3	1.4	6.1	0.8	2.1

* Others means students in general school settings except North Korean refugee students

** NKRS is an acronym for North Korean Refugee Students

Despite the decreasing rate of school dropout by North Korean refugee students, it is hard to reach the conclusion that most refugee students have adapted successfully to South Korean school environments. This is because the rate of enrolment in general schools is not considered in this data. According to a teacher at the transition school for North Korean refugee students, the rate of enrolment in the school has been decreasing for the last few years and quite a few young people try to look for a job right after the initial settlement education at Hanawon. The problem is that these

young people are more likely to be tempted to make easy money, such as working in the sex industry, as they have difficulty in finding a job due to their unstable status and lack of training (Kim, 2014; Park and Kang, 2011).

North Korean refugee students, particularly those who spent a long time in their migration, tend to have difficulty in making peer relationships with South Korean classmates at the early stage of adaptation to school, because they are mostly allocated to classes with younger students, due to their lack of academic achievement caused by school disruption (Kang et al., 2017). The differences in age and culture among students within a classroom are regarded as main factors that hinder North Korean refugee students from making friendships with South Korean pupils and thereby causing school maladjustment or dropout (Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2011). It is reported that peer relationships with South Korean pupils play an important role in successful school adjustment (Lee, 2012). It is therefore necessary to consider social relationships with South Korean peers as one of the important factors impacting young North Korean refugees. It is also worth noting that the rate of school dropout by North Korean refugee students is much higher than South Korean peers in middle and high schools. Meanwhile, most of the young North Korean refugees in alternative education settings belong to the age range of secondary school students in Korea (Han et al., 2009). It can be assumed that North Korean refugee students of high-school age are more likely to leave general schools and opt for alternative schools, and it is therefore necessary to listen to the underlying and detailed reasons why the young people leave general schools and choose alternative schools.

Alternative education for young North Korean refugees

The emergence of alternative schools is related to the social and educational environment in South Korea. Educational success in South Korea is generally seen as a key to social mobility and to a successful adult life and schools are therefore fiercely competitive (Seth, 2002). As a result, South Korean students and their parents have, to a large extent, struggled to survive in this highly competitive educational climate which emphasises individual achievement rather than co-operation. Unfortunately, young North Korean refugees are also no exception to

these national priorities and expectations. In this social atmosphere, good schools tend to be valued by strong exam results and rates of acceptance into top universities. A majority of general schools, therefore, focus on providing students with high-quality learning opportunities and experiences. On the other hand, pastoral needs are often overlooked.

In these circumstances, North Korean refugee young people with a range of social, emotional and academic needs are more likely to have difficulty in adapting to general schools as they proceed to higher grades. To resolve this problem, alternative educational provision began to appear in the 1990s, increasing in number since 2000. Most are founded by religious institutions aiming to offer holistic support the adjustment of young North Korean refugees to South Korean society.

While alternative schools aim to help young North Korean refugees overcome their traumatic experiences and become successfully integrated into South Korea, they cannot be free from the social atmosphere in which academic achievement, especially university entrance, is considered a priority at school. It is understandable that there is significant pressure on young North Korean refugees to gain at least a high school diploma if they want to secure a stable job in society. It may therefore be difficult for alternative schools to ignore these young people's needs to achieve their academic qualifications. While state-accredited schools offer a certification of high school, students involved in non-accredited schools must take a national qualification exam equivalent to a general school diploma. In this situation, alternative schools are also likely to have no choice but to focus on teaching academic subjects, leaving behind the holistic aims that they initially intended focusing on.

Alternative education for young North Korean refugees includes a range of provision: full-time education institutions, group homes, and after-school learning centres (*gong-bu-bang* in Korean) (Park, 2012). Full-time education institutions, generally called 'alternative school', are educational facilities that provide young North Korean refugees with tailored education, and experiences and opportunities to improve their academic ability, social adjustment and psychological well-being. After-school learning centres are study places where North Korean refugee students at general

schools receive supplementary lessons or study by themselves to make up for their lack of academic skills. Group homes are a type of accommodation for young North Korean refugees who do not have both parents in South Korea or who cannot receive appropriate care and protection from their parents. These young people are mostly enrolled either in general schools or in alternative schools, staying at group homes (Kim et al., 2015).

The full-time education institutions are divided into ‘state-accredited alternative schools’ (academically accredited by the Ministry of Education) and ‘non-accredited alternative educational institutions’. These two types of institutions, however, are generally called ‘alternative school’ without making the distinction of school or educational institution. As noted, students in alternative educational institutions (non-accredited) are required to take a national exam to obtain a high school qualification, whereas students in alternative schools (accredited) can obtain a high school diploma without taking the national exam. According to official statistics, there are currently ten alternative schools, nine group homes, and seven after-school learning centres registered with authorities (Ministry of Education, 2017). As previously noted, there are 226 students in state-accredited alternative schools as of 2017. Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain accurate figures for unauthorised schools and other educational provision.

According to Park (2012), one of the main reasons students choose alternative schools is related to age gaps and educational gaps with South Korean classmates at regular schools. Some choose alternative schools voluntarily for the purpose of improving their basic academic skills. Unaccompanied refugees from North Korea are more likely to choose alternative education so they can receive accommodation and financial aid. In considering the limited number of samples in Park’s research (2012), this study further investigates in more detail why they choose alternative schools, according to students’ personal backgrounds, such as age, family structure, migration history, and also school types and sizes.

While alternative education for young North Korean refugees include alternative schools and also other provisions, such as group homes and after-school learning

centres, this study focuses on alternative schools, including both state-accredited and non-accredited schools and excluding other alternative educational provision. In existing literature, alternative education for young North Korean refugees is generally referred to as education at alternative schools, while both group homes and after-school learning centres are addressed as other separate sectors, rather than as part of alternative education. It is, therefore, reasonable that the current study focuses on alternative schools as a counterpart of general schools. In addition, as noted earlier, alternative education is still an under-researched area, despite the fact that young refugees who are enrolled at alternative schools have special backgrounds and needs. By concentrating on alternative schools, this study aims to fill key gaps in knowledge and understanding of alternative education for young North Korean refugees.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the context and background to this research. It began by examining and defining the use of the term ‘refugee’ for the study. I have argued that ‘refugee’ is the most suitable term because it conveys the young people’s past tragic experiences and current unstable status in South Korea. This chapter then offered a brief history of North Korean refugees and migration factors and patterns over time. While food shortage was a main driving factor in the past, there is a current trend where North Koreans escape from their home country to seek a better life for their children. Understanding this changing trend in migration offers insights into this study that investigates the recent school experiences of young North Korean refugees. It is also notable that the majority of North Korean refugees are female, as this is linked to the increasing percentage of children and young people born in China or other countries who are now in South Korean school settings. I have also described the long-term journey of migration via several transit countries. This helps us understand young North Korean refugees’ trauma and the impacts it can have. The chapter then contained a summary of the policies and programmes set up to help North Korean refugees settle in South Korea and this was followed by an overview of South Korean education for young North Korean refugees in the settings of general schools and alternative schools. By providing essential background

information about the context, this chapter functions as a foundation for understanding the school experiences of young North Korean refugees, as researched in this study.

Chapter 3 Research design

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology and methods that I developed to address the research questions for the study. I begin by outlining the rationale for choosing the research approach, and then describe the participatory research adopted for the study. The next section explains the methods used to generate data, followed by a discussion of a pilot study that I carried out prior to embarking on fieldwork in Korea. I then outline the overall procedure of the fieldwork and discuss the issues relating to data analysis. Research ethics for the study are briefly summarised in the final section and discussed more fully in chapter 4.

Working with young people: Participatory research

This study is positioned ontologically on the premise that children and young people are viewed as social agents and experts in their own lives, and epistemologically on the foundation that their voices are an important source of knowledge.

Methodologically, this study takes a qualitative approach in order to produce rich and detailed understandings of young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds in a small-scale research project, involving them actively in the research process (Gallagher, 2009; Gallagher and Gallagher, 2008; O’Kane, 2000; Thomas and O’Kane, 1998). This study adopted participatory research on the basis of these ontological, epistemological, and methodological positions.

Choosing an appropriate methodology

Before focusing on participatory research, I discuss first how young people were viewed and why a participatory approach was employed for this study.

Views of young people in research

With a growing interest in listening to children and young people’s experiences and perspectives since the late 1980s, there has not only been a paradigm shift in

researching ‘on’ children to researching ‘with’ children, but also a growth in research methods that recognise children as social actors in their own right and engage children as active participants (O’Kane, 2000).

Christensen and Prout (2002) suggest the perceptions of children and young people identified in research settings can be seen in the following four ways: as objects, as subjects, as social actors, and as active participants and co-researchers. If children and young people are seen as objects, they are regarded as dependent, incompetent and vulnerable beings who are acted on by others and who lack the ability to consent or have their own voices heard in research. As a result, researchers carry out research from adult-centred perspectives. Researchers who understand children as subjects recognise a child’s subjectivity. Children and young people’s involvement in research, however, depends on the decisions researchers make on the basis of their understanding of children’s cognitive abilities and social competencies, such as age-based criteria. In this sense, researchers involve children in research as informants and focus on assessing children’s development and maturity.

However, newer perceptions are currently being adopted in research. One such perspective is that children and young people are social actors with their own agency in the social world. Here they are positioned at the centre of the research, and contribute with their own experiences and understandings. Child-friendly research techniques and methods thus need to be developed in order to ensure participants speak about their own experiences and views (James, 1995, cited in O’Kane, 2000). Alongside this view of children and young people as social actors, there is another concept of children and young people as active participants. This describes research as a co-production of researchers and participants and further develops the perspective of children and young people as co-researchers. This study adopted the view of young people as competent social actors who have agency in the social world in research. By employing participatory research, I sought to encourage young participants to show their agency and competency as social actors. Although this study sought to encourage young refugees to participate actively in the research process, this does not mean that the young people were active participants as Christensen and Prout (2002) suggest above. This is because the current study was

not entirely co-designed and co-produced with the young people. The practice of participation in this research is described in more detail later.

Research methods in past studies involving young North Korean refugees

To conduct a review of past studies of young North Korean refugees published in Korean, I systematically searched two Korean academic databases: Nurimedia DBpia and Koreanstudies Information Service System (KISS). Searches of similar terms were combined, such as *cheong-so-nyeon* (meaning ‘young people’ or ‘adolescents’) or *hak-saeng* (meaning ‘student’) with *tal-buk* or *buk-han-ital* (meaning ‘escaping from North Korea’). A total of 118 research articles were identified from 2000 to 2015. I excluded multiple publications of a single topic or data set, such as dissertations, conference papers, and grey literature. I included research articles in journals listed or nominated in the Korea Citation Index (KCI). I finally selected 101 articles for the review. The search was completed in January 2016. As a result of the review, I identified the gaps in research approaches adopted for studies on young North Korean refugees. The details of the relevant findings are discussed in chapter 4.

Drawing on participatory research

Given my commitment to a view of young people as social actors in their own right, and also bearing in mind the gaps in research approaches used for studies on young North Korean refugees, where a majority of those studies have been conducted by conventional research techniques, such as questionnaires or interviews (see chapter 4), I employed participatory research as the main approach to this study.

Participatory research (PR) is introduced as “a somewhat broad umbrella” under which collaborative or inclusive research methods and approaches are subsumed (Aldridge, 2015, p.8). On the other hand, participatory action research (PAR) tends to pursue social change outcomes through action research, which includes a range of participatory approaches, such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA), participatory learning and action (PLA), and participatory visual methods (Aldridge, 2015). There is also community-based prevention research (CBPR) which emphasises ‘shared participation’, ‘cooperative engagement’, ‘systems and capacity development’, and

‘community empowerment’ (Tanasiri et al., 2011, p.655). Participatory research (PR) and participatory action research (PAR) are often used interchangeably, as some of the underlying principles of participatory action research are shared with participatory research, particularly when children and young people are regarded as social actors who participate actively in the research process and work collaboratively with researchers (Aldridge, 2015). Generally, participatory research (PR) is used as the general term for a range of participatory approaches.

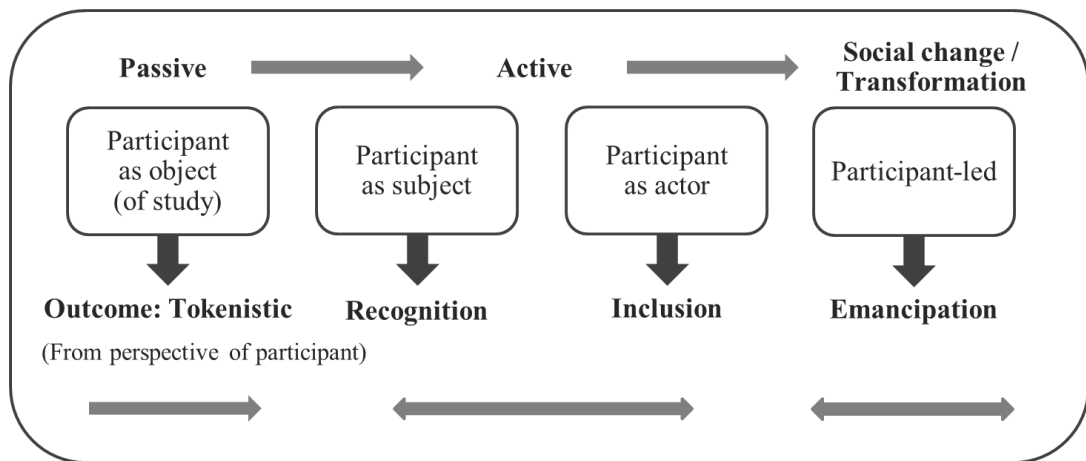
Within a participatory research setting, young North Korean refugee participants were guided to contribute to making meaning and producing knowledge, in contrast with the position of participants as research objects in other traditional methods (Aldridge, 2015). This study also placed importance on the process rather than techniques (O’Kane, 2000) and, therefore, participants were engaged in the various stages of the research process (Bourke, 2009) (see Table 3-2).

Level of participation and participatory research model

Participation was helpfully classified into eight levels by Arnstein (1969), ranked in order from having least, to most influence. ‘Manipulation’ and ‘therapy’ can hardly be seen as participation, and ‘informing’, ‘consultation’ and ‘placation’ are regarded as tokenism, not true participation. In the highest levels, ‘partnership’, ‘delegated power’ and ‘citizen participation’ can be considered as having a degree of participation. Hart (1992), drawing on Arnstein’s (1969), suggests a “ladder of participation” to convey the level of involvement by young people.

Most recently, Aldridge (2015, p.158) has provided a participatory model which is classified into four domains according to the level of participation and outcome, as seen in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Aldridge's participatory model



This model explicitly presents the four views of children and young people in research suggested by Christensen and Prout (2002), compared to Hart's ladder of participation. The detailed description of each domain is seen in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Descriptions of four domains of Aldridge's participatory model

Domain	Description
Participant as object	<p>Researcher-led</p> <p>Limited opportunities for social change outcomes</p> <p>Vulnerable/marginalised participants more likely to be excluded</p> <p>Quantitative, survey-based methods may be used as well as laboratory-based techniques</p>
Participant as subject	<p>Researcher-led but recognition of participants as individuals (but not actors)</p> <p>Social change outcomes not based on consultation with participants</p> <p>Vulnerable/marginalised participants more likely to be excluded or their needs overlooked</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative methods may be used but methods not designed or led by participants themselves</p>
Participant as actor	<p>More equal researcher-participant roles and relationships</p> <p>Consultation</p> <p>Social change outcomes but voices of participants over researcher voice</p> <p>Participants as co-researchers but not necessarily, or at all times, involved at all stages of research process</p> <p>Vulnerable/marginalised participants included</p> <p>Qualitative participatory methods used drawing on different elements of PR (narrative research, visual methods and so on)</p>

Participant – led	Participant-led research roles and relationships Consultation, inclusion Social change outcomes prioritised Voices of participants, including vulnerable/marginalised participants, prioritised at all stages Bottom up, individualised research methods and approaches used (e.g. peer-research, self-advocacy, and emancipatory methods)
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This study is perhaps closest to the third domain of Aldridge’s (2015) participatory model: ‘participants as actors’. In carrying out my research, I had on-going discussions about the study with my participants throughout the research process, though not all procedures of the study were discussed with them. Creative and indirect research methods were used by combining a visual method and one-to-one interviews. This was to encourage young North Korean refugee participants to have their own voices and speak more directly. By doing so, this study ultimately sought for positive changes in the field of education and schools for young North Korean refugees.

Defining ‘participation’ in the study

At this point, it is necessary to clarify what young people’s participation in research means in the practice of this study. To do this, in addition to Aldridge (2015) above, two studies about young people’s participation in research were employed for this study. Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015) provide the types of participation depending on how children and young people participate throughout the research procedure, from research design to dissemination and how they develop a relationship with adult researchers. Drawing on the form of participation by Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015), research decisions in the present study were chiefly led by the adult-researcher, although participants’ views and opinions were considered as important throughout the study. On the other hand, by employing a photograph-making method as a way of data collection, participants were involved partly in interpreting and analysing data that they had produced and in reporting the data through a photo exhibition, as seen in the second type of participation by Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015). In a similar way, Davis (2009) provides five stages (see below) in which

participants are involved differently: pre-data collection, data collection, analysis, reporting, and policy development or campaigning. Drawing on Davis (2009) and Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015), the participation of young North Korean refugees in the study is outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Young North Korean refugees' participation in the study

Stage	Participation
Pre-data collection	Partly involved in research decisions by preliminary meetings or pilot study
Data collection	Mainly role as research participants (Occasionally) provide advice on data generation process
Analysis	Interpret the meaning of data (only for photographs) Check the analysis of the researcher (Occasionally) provide advice on data analysis and interpretation
Reporting	Choose the form of reporting and the key messages (in photo exhibition) Check the research findings
Policy development or campaigning	Delivery of message to the community (through photo exhibition)

While I intended young North Korean refugees to participate actively in the whole research process, their participation was limited by practical issues. For example, at the beginning of the study the young people appeared to be unfamiliar with working collaboratively with someone who is regarded as an authority figure. There were also cultural and institutional factors that influenced the young people's participation. These are discussed in detail in chapter 4. I realised the gaps between my ideal expectation of young people's participation and the limitations that emerged during the research practice. I therefore needed to design the research with flexibility as an on-going process, bearing in mind that Davis (2009, p.155) says that 'Rather than trying to achieve a 'gold standard' of complete participation, it might be more helpful for you to look at what is realistic within your own context and see how this fits with your research objectives and your ethical principles'.

Data collection methods

My review of past studies identified that most studies of young North Korean refugees used traditional research techniques - surveys and interviews (see chapter 4). As noted earlier, this approach tends to come from a view of research as being ‘on’ young people, with an adult-centred perspective. I also needed to be aware of the possibility that participants may have difficulty in explaining their experiences or views in a verbal way (Aldridge, 2015) and conventional approaches may hurt young refugee participants by asking sensitive questions directly (Oh, 2012). In addition, I took into consideration a research finding that some young North Korean refugees have negative impressions of ‘doing an interview’ itself because they have experienced several stages of investigation during the process of transferring to South Korea (Lee et al., 2011). For these reasons, I was interested to find a new indirect method in which young people are encouraged to participate actively and have their own voices heard. I first took into account writing-based or art-based approaches in order to mix verbal and non-verbal approaches with one-to-one interviews. However, there was a possibility that some participants may be stressed by feeling a gap in their skills to complete such exercises, due to their deprivation in education. Film-making was also considered but I excluded it because it might make participants feel the burden of having to learn specific techniques. Although the photograph taking would also require some techniques for the participants to learn (Royce, 2004), I thought that participants may feel less burdened and would enjoy this method more because contemporary young people are used to taking photos with a digital camera or smartphone as a way of expressing their own views in their daily lives. After considering various options, I finally chose Photovoice as a main instrument for data collection, using this alongside one-to-one interviews. The section below describes in detail the data collection methods that I employed for the study.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a research tool for participatory research which was originally designed as a means to empower women in the Yunnan province of China by Wang

and Burris (1994), aiming to address community concerns and thereby affect social changes through a specific photograph technique (Harkness and Stallworth, 2013; Wang and Burris, 1997). The origin of Photovoice was Photo Novella, which is a research method that leads participants to tell their stories about their everyday lives through photographs for the purpose of teaching literacy (Wang and Burris, 1997). Photovoice is defined as ‘a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique’ (Wang and Burris, 1997, p.369) and its main aims are to enable people to: a) record and represent their everyday realities; b) promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community strengths and concerns; and c) reach policymakers (Wang, 2006, p.148).

Photovoice is built on the theoretical concepts of documentary photography, Freirean philosophy, critical consciousness, and feminist research theory (Dempsey, 2014; Strack et al., 2004). This consists of taking photos, selecting meaningful photos, telling stories about the photos in group discussions, and identifying the issues, themes and theories that emerge in the process (Wang and Burris, 1997). Researchers modify and use the approach as a way of promoting critical dialogue flexibly, in considering their own research aims or the characteristics of their participants. For instance, along with taking photographs, researchers use a range of methods for making meaning out of the photos, such as individual interviews (Newman et al., 2009; Oh, 2012), group discussions (Green and Kloos, 2009; Wee and Anthamatten, 2014), or mixed modes using interviews and discussions (Johansen and Le, 2012; Kim et al., 2015) or writing essays and discussions (Royce, 2004; Wang et al., 2000). In addition, some researchers seek individual and community improvements by publicly exhibiting students’ work (Green and Kloos, 2009; Newman et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2000). The current study also needed to use the Photovoice method flexibly for data collection. Participants in the study were allowed to choose an activity option depending on their school schedule or personal preference; for example, the photo task in a one-to-one setting or in a group setting. The young people could also participate in one-to-one interviews additionally or opt out of the photo task.

Although there is a range of research evidence that indicates Photovoice has been used to promote social changes in vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as refugees (e.g. Berman et al., 2001; Green and Kloos, 2009; Oh, 2011; 2012), only one study using Photovoice has been found in research with young North Korean refugees so far (Kim et al., 2015). Photovoice is regarded as a useful method in research with refugee children and young people. This study was designed for young refugees from North Korea to be empowered to lead the research process by taking part in the process of generating and analysing data: taking photographs, selecting meaningful ones and interpreting the selected photos. I also intended to identify young people's ways of constructing and interpreting their experiences through discussions and interviews with participants (Oh, 2012). Up to now, refugee children and young people have been regarded as a disadvantaged group, as discussed previously. The idea of young refugees as a vulnerable group leads us to underestimate their agency and capability. Hart and Tyrer (2006, p.10) argue that 'such thinking serves to distract us from the ways in which children may manifest strength and the capacities for coping with adversity'. On the basis of the idea of young people as social actors, this study sought to encourage young North Korean refugees to show their agency and capacity in the research process by using Photovoice, which places participants' voices and perspectives at the centre of the research (Oh, 2012).

By using Photovoice as an indirect method, this study also sought to protect young North Korean refugees from any harm and distress that might arise in the research process. Oh (2012) suggests that photographs may promote a participant to share the narrative of his or her past experiences as well as current daily life and researchers can therefore obtain information about their past without having to directly pose questions about their painful experiences. Participants are also likely to tell their experiences or thoughts about sensitive topics relatively easily when talking about their photos (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). It was therefore expected that this approach would help to identify how young refugees' past experiences in North Korea or transit countries intertwine with their present experiences in South Korean schools through the Photovoice technique, minimising any harm and distress that participants might experience in the research process.

This study adopted Wang's (2006) nine-step strategy for fieldwork: a) Select and recruit a target audience of policy makers or community leaders; b) Recruit a group of Photovoice participants; c) Introduce the Photovoice methodology to participants; d) Obtain informed consent; e) Pose initial theme/s for taking picture; f) Distribute cameras to participants and review how to use the camera; g) Provide time for participants to take picture; h) Meet to discuss photographs and identify themes; i) Plan with participants a format to share photographs and stories. These procedures were, however, modified flexibly in considering the particular fieldwork situation of this study. For example, Wang (2006) starts a Photovoice project by selecting and recruiting a target audience of policy makers or community leaders. In the main study, however, the participants and I mutually agreed to decide on the specific target audience later in the progress of the study. This study potentially targeted a range of people who are involved in North Korean refugee education, such as school teachers, policy makers, and administrators. At the outset of the study, the main focus was not placed on completing the whole process of Photovoice as listed by Wang, which includes a public exhibition or testing the Photovoice programme itself. Rather, the main reason that I chose Photovoice as a data collection method was to facilitate the voice of young refugee participants and to promote their participation in the study. Therefore, I did not place much emphasis on selecting a target audience at the beginning of the study.

With regard to forming a group, Wang (2006) suggests seven to ten participants as an ideal group size in a study with young people. On the other hand, Strack et al. (2004) recommend an adult-to-young people ratio of five-to-one or less, in order to promote a more conducive environment for carrying out a Photovoice project. At the initial stage of the study, Strack et al.'s (2004) suggestion looked more effective for this study, but I needed to consider the number of participants from each school and their school schedules.

Holding a workshop was one of the key parts of conducting the Photovoice project. I needed to introduce the concept, method, and aims of Photovoice to participants and also to emphasise safety and the authority and responsibility that come with using a camera as this is 'one hallmark of Photovoice training' (Wang, 2006, p.150). While

Wang (2006) distributes cameras at the sixth step, participants in the present study were allowed to use their own smartphones. This reflected the living conditions of today's young people who are highly likely to be familiar with the functions of a camera installed in a smartphone, instead of a freestanding digital camera. It was also necessary for participants to be well informed on how to take photographs well, such as how to 'focus' and the 'resolution' of images. Although several second-hand smartphones were prepared for participants who may not have any personal devices so that participants did not feel a sense of inequality or if there were any technical difficulties caused by using electronic devices, no participants requested them in the study.

After taking photographs, participants selected photos they regarded as meaningful and talked about them in a group discussion setting. Group discussions are a core part of the Photovoice method (Green and Kloos, 2009) as critical dialogue and knowledge about community concerns are promoted by group discussions of photos (Wang and Burris, 1997). A majority of studies adopting Photovoice have a group discussion to elicit young people's knowledge and understanding from photographs. I also conducted one-to-one interviews with each participant in order to provide an additional opportunity to talk more deeply about their own experiences and thoughts on the topic. As noted earlier, participants were given the opportunity to select which type of photo task they preferred, whether working one-to-one, in a pair, or a group. Eight of the 12 young people chose a group setting and another two preferred to carry out a one-to-one activity for the photo task. The remaining two participated only in individual interviews without the photo task.

According to Wang (2006) and Goodhart et al. (2006), participants subsequently codify the issues, themes or theories that arise from their photographs. In my study, the coding process was conducted by the researcher instead. The researcher shared the findings of the data analysis with participants at the final stage of the study in order to check the data and to improve trustworthiness. A professional photographer and a journalist joined this study to provide some recommendations on taking photos and presenting them, so that participants built their confidence in doing a photo task (Wang and Redwood-Jones, 2001).

In conclusion, the Photovoice project of this study carried out the following five steps: a) Recruiting participants; b) Conducting Photovoice training; c) Taking photos; d) Facilitating group discussions or one-to-one interviews; e) Holding a photo exhibition. The practice of Photovoice in the study is described in more detail in chapter 4.

One-to-one interviews

Alongside using Photovoice, this study also used one-to-one interviews to collect data. All 12 young North Korean refugees participated in individual interviews. This group was composed of ten young people who participated in the Photovoice project and two participants who chose to take part only in the interviews. The interviews were undertaken in order to provide an opportunity for each participant to talk deeply and freely about the key topics. I foresaw it as an opportunity to obtain rich and detailed data, which is in tune with the intention of participatory research to gain deep insights into human experiences through close relationships between the researcher and participants (Aldridge, 2015). The young people might also feel sensitive when sharing their personal experiences and views in a group setting and their group discussions were therefore likely to be ‘superficial’ and ‘lacking depth’ (Green and Kloos, 2009, p.472). Most, but not all, talked about their personal experiences and views more freely and deeply when interviewed individually. This is in line with a finding from one study with young Southern African people in the context of HIV/AIDS (Pattman, 2015).

From my review of the literature and advice from school teachers, I gained some practical tips for carrying out interviews with young North Korean refugees. I needed to focus on the needs of individual participants and be particularly attentive to subtle cues of students feeling discomfort or suggesting a desire to end the interview in one-to-one settings (Greig et al., 2007). Due to the sensitive nature inherent in research with young refugees, it was important to pay close attention to the order of the questions within each interview. I found it useful to consider the advice of Hopkins in his work with refugee participants. Hopkins (2008) scheduled his interviews with unaccompanied refugee children about their present and immediate past, and the pre-

flight in order to lower the possibility of emotional harm and distress. Likewise, I opened interviews by using warm-up or cool-down questions rather than going to directly heavy or sensitive questions. This helped to reduce the potential tension which might be caused by interviews, and made the interviews more interactive, because I asked general questions and specific questions alternately. On the other hand, it took much longer than I expected to conduct one-to-one interviews with each participant and so I sometimes felt tired due to such long interviews (see chapter 4). ‘Flexibility’ was another important consideration when carrying out the interviews. While interviews were structured by the interview schedule (see Appendix 6), with key research topics that the researcher aimed to cover during the interview, the structure itself was applied flexibly in order to address the research topics in the most suitable way for participants (Yeo et al., 2014). The order of the interview questions was also used flexibly depending on participants’ responses and reactions.

In addition, there was another practical issue that I was aware of. Gallagher (2009) suggests that the location should be comfortable, nicely furnished and well lit with natural light; that it should be quiet and private; and that the place is on neutral ground or has positive associations. To respect participants’ preferences, I asked participants to choose their preferred places and times for interviews. Interestingly, most participants suggested that we had the interview sessions away from their schools. The main places that participants chose for interview were cafés near the schools, a local library, or a youth centre in a local church. These were ordinary places that South Korean adolescents could access easily for studying, meeting friends or doing extra activities. I, as a researcher, should have asked why they chose the places for their interviews. My subjective understanding of their decision, however, was that they seemed to invite me to a space that was part of their day-to-day ordinary lives and regarded the interviews as an informal conversation rather than a formal interview.

It was also necessary to be sensitive to participants’ unexpected reactions and to understand the underlying causes for these and to manage such situations appropriately. Prior research suggests, for example, that children and young people may remain silent as a strategy for protecting themselves (Kohli, 2006), or weep as a

healing process while talking about painful experiences (Ennew and Plateau, 2004). During this research, there were also several times when participants kept silent or wept during the interviews. One of the participants wept when she told me about her experience of human trafficking in China, but she said that she felt much better after weeping. This is set out in detail in the following chapter.

Bearing in mind that this study adopted a participatory approach, I aimed to carry out interviews as an interactive process, not as in a conventional approach where researchers generally refrain from engaging with interviewees emotionally and maintain a certain distance from participants (Pattman, 2015). As an example, Oakley (1981) obtained rich information by engaging actively in conversation with interviewees and sharing her experiences as a mother in her research with women in the late 1970s in England. Aldridge (2015) also says that participants' authentic experiences are likely to be reflected naturally in the less structured interviews led by interviewees. Despite the advantages of interview methods, it was also important to bear in mind that interviews were not a passkey with which I could always open up young people's minds and gain meaningful data from vulnerable participants.

The pilot study

A pilot study was conducted in order to test the feasibility of the instrument of data collection and analysis and to check my skills as a researcher with participants from North Korean refugee backgrounds. I piloted the research with a North Korean refugee student who had recently finished at an alternative school. The pilot study followed the procedure: a) Recruiting participants; b) Information session and obtaining informed consent; c) Photo task (taking photos and talking about them); d) Additional interview; e) Gaining feedback from the participant.

This pilot study enabled me to: a) test the feasibility of Photovoice as a participatory research tool that young people could use to take part in the process of data collection and data analysis; b) evaluate the adequacy of the procedure of obtaining informed consent and feedback on the research process from participants; c) revise the research guidelines for young refugee students and school teachers; d) consider

practical challenges, such as ethical issues and time management; and e) develop overall qualitative research skills, including data analysis techniques. I discuss each of these stages in turn below, along with the lessons learned.

Participant recruitment

This pilot study used a purposive sampling strategy to select participants. This strategy enables a researcher to explore and deeply understand the main themes and questions of the study (Ritchie et al., 2014). Participants for this pilot study were recruited through one of the NGOs who support young North Korean refugees in South Korea. As this NGO provided funding for North Korean refugee students, there were ten students who had recently finished alternative schools at the time of the study. Three students in total showed interest in this research, but finally only one student agreed to join the pilot study. The participant was a male university student aged 23 who had finished at an alternative school in February 2016. As the pilot study was carried out with only one participant, it was hard to foresee the drawbacks and constraints of the data collection method which might be revealed in the main study involving a dozen participants. To overcome this limitation of the pilot study, I asked two school teachers working with North Korean refugee students and one young woman from North Korea for advice on the study design for working with North Korean refugee young people.

Information session

I started the fieldwork for the pilot study by gaining consent from the participant in October 2016. For the first meeting at the NGO office, information about this project was given to the participant. I explained the details of what the pilot study involved, and then collected a written consent form from the participant. As I intended to employ participatory research methodology, I asked the participant's opinion on the research procedure, such as place and time for doing the project and the way of sending his photos and giving his feedback to the researcher. We agreed to have the subsequent meetings at his university library and he sent me his photos and feedback via email or message.

Once I was open to listening to the participant's opinion, he actively expressed his thoughts and opinions and suggested better ideas for the research project. He suggested that I change the sentence order of specific items in the consent form and use simple expressions in the leaflet in order to help North Korean refugee students to understand them more easily. In addition, he suggested that I make a small-sized name card with my contact information, including my university logo, so that young North Korean refugees would trust me as a researcher. I also agreed with his ideas and so amended the consent form and the leaflet and made a name card with my university logo to respect his opinion and reflect it in practice.

Photo task

At our next meeting, I showed the participant the amended consent form and leaflet and my name card. He was surprised that I had put his ideas into action. We then went on to talk about two photos that he had submitted before the meeting. I used the PHOTO method based on Freirian problem-posing questioning (Hussey, 2006) to interview the participant about his experiences and stories portrayed in the photographs: 1) Describe your picture. 2) What is happening in your picture? 3) Why did you take a picture of this? 4) What does this picture tell us about your life? 5) How can this picture provide opportunities for us to improve life? We started talking about photos that the participant had taken, focusing on these five questions, but our conversation was not limited by the photos. I asked the interview questions drawn from my research questions implicitly while talking about the photos. By so doing, we had a conversation not only about his current school experiences in South Korea but also about his past experiences in North Korea and other countries during his migration journey, without being asked directly about them through interview questions. We were able to carry out our conversation naturally and informally, drawing on the data derived from his photos.

Feedback session

My initial plan was to provide a small-sized notebook, named 'Research Diary', for participants to take note of their ideas and to record their reflections on the research

process. The participant agreed with the necessity for writing the research diary, but suggested using a smartphone application for taking a memo, and a message or an email for sharing his own reflections and feedback with me. Unlike my initial expectation at the stage of research design, it seemed that young people might prefer using electronic devices to writing things out by hand.

I allotted a certain amount of time for reviewing the day's activity at the end of each meeting and also made a phone call and sent a message or an email to monitor and facilitate the participant's progress. My original plan was to arrange a separate face-to-face meeting for the reflection session but it was hard to carry this out in practice. To check the feasibility of validating research findings with the participant, I had a final feedback session at the final stage of the pilot study. We talked about the pilot study experience with transcribed materials and a summary of research findings. Lastly, I gave the participant a book voucher with a handwritten card in acknowledgement of his time, effort and contribution to the pilot study. In particular, he said that he was touched by the handwritten card, and expressed his thanks for having an exciting experience by taking part in the pilot study.

Some changes after the pilot study

This pilot study contributed to making some changes to the materials, methods and procedures in preparation for the field research. Some changes after the pilot study are shown in Table 3.3.

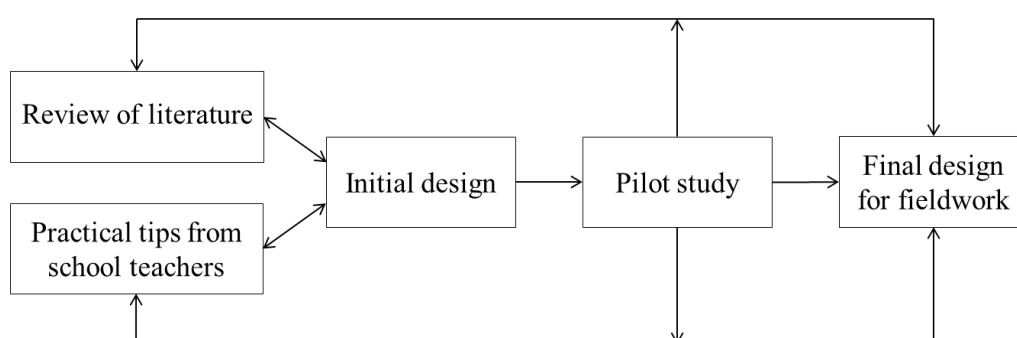
Table 3.3 Changes in research design after the pilot study

	Before	After	Reasons
Consent form	‘I agree that the information shared by me with the researcher will be used in the researcher’s PhD thesis and in publications or presentations. <u>I understand that I will not be identifiable from the data.</u> ’	‘ <u>I understand that I will not be identifiable from the data.</u> I agree that the information shared by me with the researcher will be used in the researcher’s PhD thesis and in publications or presentations.’	To emphasise the benefit for the participants rather than contribution. (This sentence order sounds better when translated into Korean.)
Research diary	Distribute a small sized notebook and submit the notebook afterwards	Use smartphone application for taking a memo and send it by email or message	To reflect young people’s preference for electronic devices
Contact information	Include the researcher’s contact information in the leaflet	Make the researcher’s name card separately	To provide evidence of the researcher’s credentials and to help participants keep the information easily
Feedback session	Organise separate sessions	Allocate around 5-10 minutes to review the day’s activity at the end of every session	To consider participants’ busy schedules and use time effectively
Questioning technique	SHOWeD method (Wang et al., 2000)	PHOTO method (Hussey, 2006)	To talk about participants’ school experiences freely and actively

Fieldwork for data collection

The main study was carried out with young North Korean refugees from three alternative schools in South Korea. Below, I describe in more detail the fieldwork; from developing the fieldwork design to conducting the individual interviews. To develop the design for the fieldwork, I used an iterative process, moving back and forth in reviewing the literature, receiving practical advice from school teachers working for young North Korean refugees, and conducting the pilot study and reviewing its lessons, as seen in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Developing the fieldwork design



The fieldwork process is summarised in Table 3.4. I continued to refine the fieldwork design as an on-going process while interacting with participants.

Table 3.4 Final design for fieldwork

Stage	Meeting	Activity
Phase 1	Information session	Recruit participants Distribute research information
	Introduction & Training session	Gain informed consent Distribute workbooks for Photovoice Group formation for discussions Free-associate about school experiences Review the session & Arrange next meeting
Phase 2	Between sessions	Participants take photos
	Photo task session 1	Choose one or two photos for group discussion Talk about the photos in a group setting Review the session & Arrange next meeting
	Between sessions	Participants take photos
	Photo task session 2	Choose one or two photos for group discussion Talk about the photos in a group setting Review the session & Arrange next meeting
	Photo exhibition	Hold a public exhibition of the Photovoice project
Phase 3	Interview session	Individual interview about research topics Review the session & Arrange next meeting
Phase 4	Feedback	Check research findings with participants Share the reflections on participation in research Listen to feedback on the project from participants
	Leaving the field	Express thanks to all participants, teachers and administrators involved in the study

As mentioned earlier, participants were allowed to choose a one-to-one activity instead of joining in a group, depending on each person's preference. Separate interview sessions were conducted additionally or optionally in the case of participants who chose a one-to-one activity for the photo task sessions. The details of conducting the fieldwork are described in chapter 4.

Data analysis

This study had rich and in-depth data that young North Korean refugee participants produced during Photovoice activities and one-to-one interviews. As the participants who had taken part in the photo task sessions interpreted their own photos, the researcher focused on analysing participants' accounts, not the photos themselves. The data was analysed separately and then combined together. I also exchanged text messages and emails with participants during the project, but these were not regarded as core data in the study. This is because the text was not related directly to the research questions, although it offered me useful insights for analysing my data. I outline in more detail below my approach to analysing data, and address issues of trustworthiness and reflexivity to improve the robustness of the study.

Recording and transcription of young refugees' discussions and interviews

All group discussions and individual interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder with all the participants' permission. It was necessary to clearly explain the purpose of audio recordings to participants in order to minimise the negative impression of recording interviews, such as for police investigation, and to respect their own decisions on the matter. At the start of the discussions and interviews I explained the purpose of recording as follows: 'I have difficulty writing down and talking at the same time' and 'I want to ensure I have an accurate record of what you have said' (Gallagher, 2009, p.81). Fortunately, all participants agreed to the recording being used in the study. What the participants talked about in information sessions or other informal meetings was not recorded, as these took place before I obtained permission from the participants. In these cases, I briefly took notes on the participants' discussions and made a summary of the most important points immediately after the meetings were over. The summary was shared and checked with the participants for the accuracy of the data. While I initially planned to send audio files as well as transcripts to participants if they wished, only one participant required the audio files of the interview in which he had been involved.

The audio files were transcribed first in Korean, the native language of the researcher and participants. My approach to transcribing the recorded data was based on what Evers (2011, p.9) describes as ‘pragmatic transcription’.

As pragmatic transcription is a format of transcription which is not formalized, it will produce a verbatim text which may differ per project. It will exclude things not needed for the particular analysis at hand (e.g., every instance of stuttering) and include aspects thought interesting or relevant (overlapping speech, silences/hesitations without timing them), depending on the specific purpose of analysis and the time and budget available.

Any speech which was extraneous to the research aims, along with meaningless repetition of words, such as ‘um’ and ‘ah’, were omitted from the transcriptions. However, I included specific gestures, tones of speech, lengths of silences, and other notable contextual information where these added to meaning (Wellard and McKenna, 2001). I also transcribed my own questions and reactions in order to analyse interactions between the interviewer and interviewee, if needed. Although pragmatic transcription was adopted for this study, it was important to have participants’ speech transcribed in detail, so that I secured the trustworthiness of the study (Skukauskaite, 2014).

Transcription was also tied to ethical issues in the study, particularly relating to confidentiality. Therefore, all transcripts were made manually by the researcher’s own hand, not employing other assistants, in order to protect the confidentiality of the young refugee participants. In addition, it has been argued that transcription is not simple document work but a stage of data analysis in itself. I therefore recognised transcription as ‘the integration of transcribing and analysis’ (Bolden, 2015, p.277) and as a constructive and interpretive act (Green et al., 1997; Poland, 1995), and made a decision on how to approach my transcription, taking into consideration the complexity inherent in the process.

At this point, I translated the extracts from Korean to English. I also used a back-translation method to validate the translation. The Korean extracts were translated first into English by the researcher and were then translated back into Korean by a Korean-English bilingual translator. The original data source in Korean was not

shown to the translator. After that, the two versions of the translation were compared to identify problem items and revise them (Sperber, 2004).

Thematic analysis

The text data generated by the group discussions and additional interviews were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis is ‘a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data’ (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p.297). The data analysis began from the early stage of data collection. When I conducted group discussions and one-to-one interviews, I wrote down emerging themes and keywords in my research diary after each session. This study adopted the six stages of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as a main approach to analysing the collected data: 1) Familiarising yourself with the data; 2) Generating initial codes; 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing themes; 5) Defining and naming themes; 6) Producing the report. This approach to data analysis was not a linear but an iterative process, moving back and forth throughout the stages of the research.

As the first stage of thematic analysis, I familiarised myself with my data while transcribing the group discussion and interview data by myself. In fact, the data for the study was collected by myself and, therefore, I was able to start analysing the data with ‘some prior knowledge of the data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87). To transcribe the verbal data into written texts, I listened to the audio recordings repeatedly. This enabled me not only to be more familiar with the data but also to focus on the details in participants’ accounts. I then read and re-read the transcribed data, classifying it according to the research questions and highlighting possible codes emerging from the transcripts and making notes for coding. After that, I re-listened to the entire audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed data before the next stage of generating initial codes.

Initially, I tried to generate as many possible codes as I could manually, through reading transcripts repeatedly. I also took memos of what was interesting on the margin of the transcripts. These memos were useful and helpful for searching for

themes and relationships among codes afterwards. I then categorised and labelled the initial codes according to the research questions. Subsequently, I rearranged the initial codes, and sorted and resorted, classified and reclassified, and assembled and reassembled my data by using NVivo. This software helped me to compare and contrast data in an easier way than doing so manually (Cohen et al., 2011). In particular, this software was useful for collating the coded extracts and for cross-checking that all relevant data were coded. Moving back and forth between the coded extracts and the transcripts, I developed a matrix to find relationships and connections across the codes and search for themes running through the data, linking to the research questions. In this phase, I set a few categories of codes that did not seem to fit directly into my research questions aside, for the purpose of using them afterwards. These provided the contexts of other code items and helped me search for interesting aspects underpinning the entire data set. As potential themes emerged at this stage, I rearranged all the relevant coded extracts according to the identified themes and grouped them under an overarching theme. I then had a resting period for around a month without reading and listening to the data, and went on to review the relevant literature on the study in order to gain some insights into analysing and interpreting the data.

Here, it was also necessary to consider how to illustrate the themes. In this regard, Attride-Stirling (2001, p.387) suggests thematic networks as ‘a way of organising a thematic analysis of qualitative data’. The thematic networks systematise the themes into three levels: basic theme, organising theme, and global theme. This thematic network is useful for representing the themes according to hierarchy and to understand the characteristics of each level of themes (see Appendix 1). Similarly, the terms ‘overarching theme’ and ‘sub-theme’, and ‘thematic map’ are used in Braun and Clarke (2006).

After the resting period, I revisited the data and the extracted themes. The themes at this stage were still candidate themes and I therefore reviewed them again and refined those themes. I read all the extracts again for the coherency and consistency of data within the candidate themes and then revisited the entire transcripts to ascertain the accuracy of the candidate thematic map. By reading the whole data set

again, I confirmed how well the thematic map worked within the data set and found additional codes or new themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Once I was satisfied with the thematic map produced by this process, I conducted an interpretative process with the data, linking them to my research questions.

Trustworthiness and reflexivity

To establish the trustworthiness of the study, I used the criteria - credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability - proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This study ensured that participants had their own voices during the research process by adopting a participatory research approach. I also checked the accuracy of the interpretation of the data with the participants in order to minimise the possibility of misinterpretation or misrepresentation (Aldridge, 2015; Thomas and O’Kane, 1998). I also assigned two chapters of the thesis to offer a detailed description of the research methods and methodological issues identified during the research process.

One of the key strategies used to enhance the robustness of the study, was my effort to be aware of reflexive issues, reflecting the research methods and my own subjectivity that may influence the study (Langdridge, 2007). Reflexivity is regarded as central to the qualitative research process (Bryman, 2015; Holloway and Biley, 2011) and is defined as ‘thoughtful, conscious self-awareness’ and utilises an ‘immediate, continuing, dynamic, and subjective self-awareness’ (Finlay, 2002, pp.532-533). This is practised in a variety of ways (e.g. Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). In the current study, I drew on 10 questions suggested by Langdridge (2007, p.59) to practise the reflexive approach to the study: 1) Why am I carrying out this study? 2) What do I hope to achieve with this research? 3) What is my relationship to the topic being investigated? 4) Who am I, and how might I influence the research I am conducting in terms of age, sex, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and any other relevant cultural, political or social factors? 5) How do I feel about the work? 6) How will my subject position influence the analysis? 7) How might the outside world influence the presentation of findings? 8) How might the findings have an impact on the participants? 9) How might the findings have an impact on the discipline and my

career in it? 10) How might the findings have an impact on wider understandings of the topic?

I often asked the above questions to myself as a researcher and documented the details of what I experienced, identified, and reflected on during the research process. The findings from my reflexive approach to the study are presented in the next chapter.

Research ethics

This study complied with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research by the British Educational Research Association (2011). Ethical clearance was obtained through the Moray House School of Education Ethics Committee according to regulations governing the conduct of research by the University of Edinburgh. The copy of the official approval letter from the Ethics Committee is found in Appendix 2.

In Korea, where I conducted my fieldwork, I did not need to apply for additional institutional review board (IRB) permission. According to the national regulations offered by the Korea National Institute for Bioethics Policy, in the case of research for a PhD thesis, once a researcher obtains the IRB permission from his/her university or institution, additional permission is not required at a national level. I, however, needed to obtain permission to access a school from the head teacher (or school principal) of each school and requested informed consent from young participants and their parents or legal guardian (if a participant was under 18) to participate in the study, in compliance with the Child Welfare Law in Korea. It was important for the researcher to be aware of research ethics throughout the research process in considering the sensitivity inherent in the study involving young North Korean refugees. The information about participants, such as the names of individuals and places, was disguised in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. All participants were called by their own pseudonyms in this thesis, instead of referring to them as a young refugee, on the basis of the findings of this study that some did not want to define themselves as ‘refugees’ (see chapter 6). To

protect young people from harm and distress, participants were assured that they could avoid sensitive topics or specific questions that they were reluctant to answer. The details of ethical considerations of the study, along with my approaches in addressing the practical issues identified during the research process, are set out in chapter 4.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology and data collection methods that I used for the study. This study aligned with the aims of participatory research and its view of young people as active participants rather than research objects, in its exploration of the views and experiences of 12 young North Korean refugees in alternative schools, and their successes and challenges. This study aimed to ensure that the young refugee participants had a voice throughout the research process. Photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1997) was used to facilitate data collection. In light of the fact that all the participants were young people with complex and traumatic refugee backgrounds, I conducted one-to-one interviews to give them scope to talk in depth about their views and experiences. The collected data was transcribed manually and analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To ensure trustworthiness, I employed the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and the 10 questions developed by Langdridge (2007) as a reflexive approach to enhance the robustness of the study. The study aimed to take full account of the many ethical issues related to conducting the fieldwork. The details of this fieldwork, including methodological and ethical considerations, and my reflections on the research procedure, are set out in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Reflections on research method, design and ethics

Introduction

During this research, I experienced a variety of challenging as well as rewarding moments while working with young refugees from North Korea. This chapter first explores methodological issues identified in my review of the literature, and I then go on to share my experiences in accessing and recruiting participants. The next section discusses ethical considerations and practical issues that I faced in the study, followed by the findings from using Photovoice in practice. The final section discusses facilitators and barriers to listening to young people's voices in the study, including the researcher's overall reflections.

Methodological issues

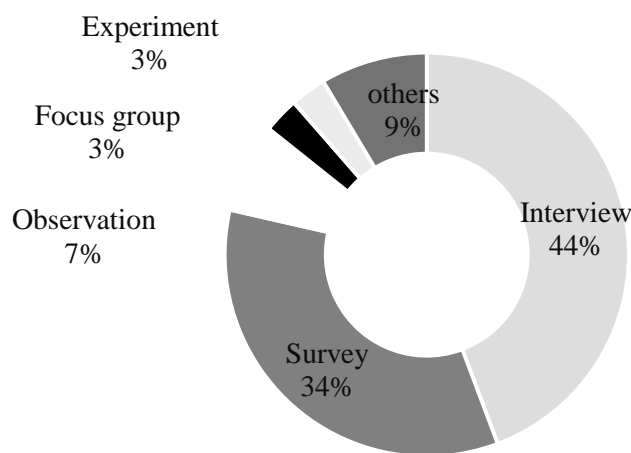
The main aim of the study was to examine the role of alternative schools in the integration of young North Korean refugees into South Korean society by exploring the young people's challenges and successes in alternative school settings, where I adopted to listen to young people's voices as a way of reaching them. To do this, it was necessary, first of all, to examine how the young people had had their own voices heard in research in the past. As the number of North Korean refugees arriving in South Korea as part of a family unit has increased since 2000, there has been a growing body of literature on North Korean refugee children and young people. According to my review of past studies (see chapter 3), 34 of the 101 studies were carried out as non-empirical research, for example, reviewing relevant literature or analysing administrative data. 27 and 36 studies adopted quantitative approaches and qualitative approaches respectively. There were also four studies conducted using mixed methods approaches, as seen in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Approaches to research on young North Korean refugees

Classification		Number
Empirical Research	Quantitative approach	27
	Qualitative approach	36
	Mixed methods approach	4
Non-empirical Research		34
Total (the number of articles)		101

The finding also shows that the empirical research methods used for collecting data were chiefly interviews (44%) and surveys (34%), as seen in Figure 4.1 below.

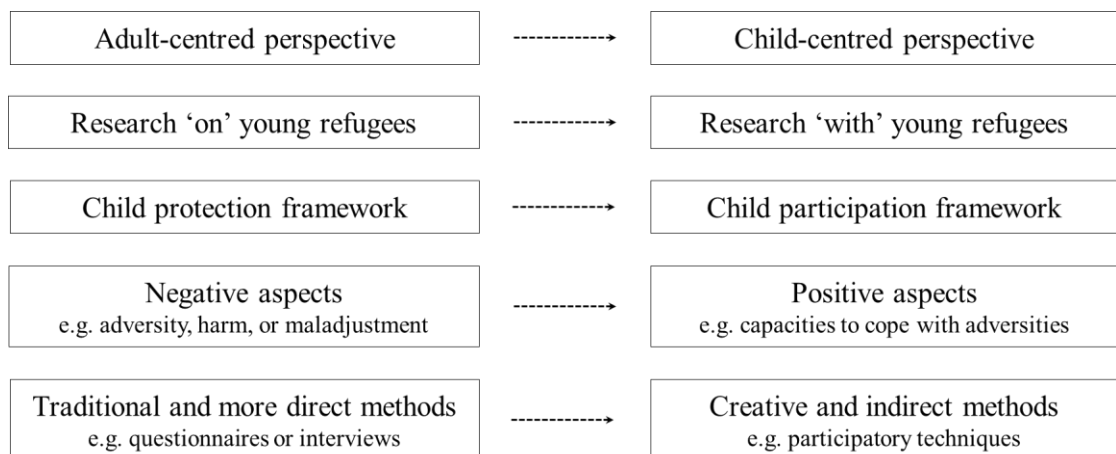
Figure 4.1 Data collection methods used in research on young North Korean refugees



In the context of approaches to research involving children and young people in Korea, it seems that qualitative approaches take up a large part of research on young North Korean refugees, compared with research on other groups of children and young people. For instance, documentary analysis and surveys with parents are mostly used for research on children with disabilities (Choi and Kim, 2014).

Quantitative approaches account for 86 per cent of the total research on children in multicultural families. Its main purposes are also to identify the learning and development of children and to investigate teachers' perceptions and parents' concerns (Cho, 2015), rather than to explore children's views. This study also found a trend that a majority of studies of young North Korean refugees have used conventional research techniques, such as questionnaires or interviews (see Figure 4.1). Meanwhile, from my review of the literature, I found that most research describes those children and young people as a vulnerable and marginalised group who need help and support, focusing on their traumatic experiences, rather than articulating their capacities and agencies to cope with their difficult situations and achieve their life goals. Undeniably, this research has contributed to enhancing our understandings of young North Korean refugees' situations and has led to policies to help and support them. On the other hand, in order to help and support those young people better, I would argue that it is necessary to maintain a balance of exploring the positive and negative sides of their lives and also to listen more carefully and directly to what they want to say, beyond what researchers want to know. On the basis of the findings from my review of the literature, I suggest a research paradigm shift that I sought for in this study, as outlined in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Research paradigm shifts sought by this study



Accessing and recruiting participants

Preliminary visit

As a first step of fieldwork design, I visited three alternative schools for young North Korean refugees and met two head teachers and one administrator between December 2015 and January 2016. They all had been working with North Korean refugee children and young people for more than ten years. Young refugees from North Korea are regarded as a 'hard-to-reach' population among Korean researchers who undertake small-scale research on an individual basis. Most school head teachers tend to be reluctant to open the schools to outsiders because they feel it is their duty to protect students from harm and distress that may arise when refugee students' personal information is exposed to outsiders (Cho, 2013). I therefore felt the necessity of gaining the trust of the gatekeepers in the first instance in order to make my fieldwork feasible by first recruiting schools that would be willing to participate. From these preliminary visits, I also received some practical advice for the study, such as when it would be appropriate to contact North Korean refugee students and how I could build up a rapport with them. One of the head teachers recommended that I participate in voluntary work for North Korean refugee students as a step to making a positive relationship with students and school staff.

Although I was able to improve my understanding of young North Korean refugees and to gain positive responses from the gatekeepers about access, the visits were not considered as a part of my fieldwork. This is because these were entirely informal and opportunistic meetings organised by my personal social network. I also did not obtain prior ethical approval for the visits to schools from the University Ethics Committee. Therefore, I had a conversation with the gatekeepers carefully in order to keep refugee students' privacy and comply with ethical principles. Overall, the early reconnaissance visits helped me to make a decision about the entire research design (Lewis, 2003).

The role of gatekeepers in the study

There was an expectation that accessing the three schools and recruiting potential participants there would be easy as I had already met the gatekeepers via the preliminary visits as described above. However, I encountered unexpected challenges when I visited those schools again for my fieldwork in August 2016. This was an issue associated with gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are defined as ‘adults who are able to control or limit researchers’ access to the participants’ (Coyne, 2009, p.452).

Therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to negotiate with adult gatekeepers before obtaining informed consent from participants, thereby gaining opt-in and advice associated with research (Hood et al., 1996). Taking into consideration the research population for the study as young people with refugee backgrounds, it seemed important to maintain co-operative relationships, as previous research (Bogolub and Thomas, 2005; Thomas and O’Kane, 1998) has advised. In the current study, however, I faced and overcame a range of barriers during the process of negotiating with gatekeepers for access to potential participants.

In school 4, when I first had a talk with a gatekeeper on the phone, he was unwilling to meet me in person, expressing his negative opinion towards my research approach. After that, I sent an information sheet by email and asked him to give me an opportunity to explain my research in a face-to-face meeting. When I had a meeting with him in person, he suggested that I did volunteer work as a full-time teacher for longer than a semester. Although this volunteer work would have helped me build a trusting relationship with North Korean refugee students and thereby recruit participants from the school, it was difficult in practice to spend around four months entirely doing volunteer work at a school within the limited time of the fieldwork. Further meetings were made twice but there was no way of accessing the school as long as I did not accept the suggestion by the head teacher. I finally decided to withdraw my plan to work with this school.

In another case, a gatekeeper suggested an alternative, instead of offering permission to access the school site. When I visited school 3 and explained my research in the first meeting, the gatekeeper showed interest in this project. Unfortunately, she

rejected giving me access to students attending the school due to the intensive curriculum of the school. Instead, she suggested that I conduct the project with refugee students who had recently finished at the school. She arranged a meeting to recruit participants through the graduates' union.

In these two cases, the gatekeepers explicitly did not permit my access by suggesting a condition or an alternative. However, I did not feel that this was a process of 'negotiating' in the real meaning of the word, because the only option that I was able to choose was 'accepting' or 'not accepting' their suggestions. Therefore, it may be a limitation of this study that the young people's right to participate in research was exercised within a boundary decided by gatekeepers.

Access to research sites

After I faced unexpected challenges with those schools I initially visited, I changed my original plan and visited other alternative schools. In total, I approached seven alternative schools, an after-school programme centre, and a group home, and finally obtained permission from three alternative schools and conditional permission from a school, as described in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Alternative schools for young North Korean refugees

ID	Features	Access
School 1	State-accredited school (authorised by the local authority) Full-time schooling system	Permitted
2	Private educational institution Full-time schooling system	Permitted
3	Charity-run educational institution Residential school	Permitted
4	Private educational institution Full-time schooling system	Permitted (conditional)
5	Transition school Full-time schooling system	Not permitted
6	State-accredited school (authorised by the local authority) Full-time schooling system	Not permitted
7	Private educational institution Full-time schooling system	Not permitted
Others	After-school programme Group home	Not permitted

To gain access to the target population, I contacted each of schools formally and informally by phone, email, and in a face-to-face meeting. Fortunately, it was possible to draw a sample from the three different types of alternative schools, as seen in Table 4.2: a state-accredited school (1), a private educational institution (2), and a residential school (3). The latter two schools are classified as non-accredited schools.

School 1 has been regarded as a representative school for North Korean refugee young people, since it was established in 2004. It might be worth noting that this school has both characteristics of an alternative school and a general school by obtaining accreditation from the state education department. This school has not only the formalised curriculum and system of a general school but also the holistic care programmes of alternative schools. In addition, this school has rarely allowed students to be exposed to outside researchers until now. In this respect, the current study may make a certain contribution to the field of research on education for young

North Korean refugees by selecting this school as a sample. On the other hand, school 3 is a relatively new school, having been established in 2012. As a residential school, there are only around 15 students and classes are formed of mixed-age and tutorial-based classes. While the school was not equipped with the formalised schooling system as a formal school, the school was expected to contribute to the study as a school with some unique features of a residential school. School 2 is the most common type of alternative school for young refugees from North Korea. Although school 2 has a full-time schooling system similar to regular schools, students there need to take a national exam to acquire high school qualifications, as they cannot obtain a high school diploma after graduation from this kind of non-accredited alternative school. Overall, the process of selecting and contacting schools and negotiating my access with gatekeepers was very time-consuming and I also felt time pressures due to the delayed process. This experience led me, as a novice researcher, to realise the importance of being flexible and not rushing during the research process.

Recruitment of participants

Sampling

A total of 12 young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds were invited to participate in the study from three alternative schools. The total number of the sample was decided by considering the research purpose, questions and methodology. I first considered the nature of the target populations (Cohen et al., 2011) and a great deal of information that qualitative research generates and intensive research sources (Ritchie et al., 2014). The methodology that I adopted for the study also influenced the appropriateness of the sample size. It was recognised that participatory research would be an overall time-consuming process (Oakley, 1991) and, moreover, it could take a certain period of time for the researcher to build a trusting relationship with each participant (Streng et al., 2004). Another determinant was the students' busy schedules in the Korean educational environment. This study was conducted during an academic semester and, thus, I was able to meet participants mostly after school. In addition, most students at alternative schools took part in extra-curricular activities,

such as additional lessons, healing programmes, or club activities. My financial budget, as a self-funded researcher, was also included in my considerations (Baker and Edwards, 2012), because a public photo exhibition was planned as a part of using Photovoice in this study. Luckily, the photo exhibition was funded by one of the participating schools. As an individual, novice and self-funded researcher, I needed to think about the external working conditions where I conducted the study, as well as my internal research ability. For these reasons, I decided to conduct the study with approximately 12 participants.

Meanwhile, the sample size depended on how many students there were likely to be in the age range I was interested in in each school. Taking into account the size of school classes, I planned to work with six to seven students from school 1, and two to three students from each of schools 2 and 3. School 1 is one of the biggest schools, with around 100 enrolled students and I, therefore, asked to meet the students in two classes to take an information session. On the other hand, in schools 2 and 3 my initial plan was to invite all the students who met my criteria for inclusion in the study to the information session and then take participants from these, because those schools were relatively small-sized alternative schools. However, in school 3, I was not allowed to meet enrolled students in person at the time of the study. Instead, I recruited a participant who had recently finished at the school through the graduate union of the school, as described earlier. The final sample of young North Korean refugees in alternative school settings included eight students from school 1, three students from school 2, and one student from school 3.

Only North Korean refugee students who were enrolled in South Korean alternative schools or had recently finished at their school were included in the study. In terms of age range, my initial plan was to work with students aged 16-24. According to previous research, most of the students enrolled in alternative schools are of high school level (Han et al., 2009). Generally, students aged 16-18 are enrolled in high school in South Korea. The Ministry of Education, however, takes into consideration the wide range of young North Korean refugees who have educational deprivation due to their migration journey. Thus, the possible age of participants was extended to around 24 years old, as the relevant regulation says that young North Korean

refugees under age 24 who have been admitted or transferred to a high school or below are eligible for educational support by the state (see chapter 2). One female student (Dabin, aged 27) was included by her willingness to join the study.

Thankfully, she offered plenty of meaningful data for the study. While I initially intended to sample females and males in equal number to examine gender differences, eight young women and four young men were sampled for the main study. Although I did not intend to reflect the current gender ratios of the entire young North Korean refugee population (66% females and 34% males, as of 2016), as a result, females and males were sampled at a ratio of three to one. Participants who could not speak Korean were excluded from the study.

Recruitment process

My approach to recruiting participants was as follows. I held an information briefing session to share information about the project and clarify particularities. The intentions of doing this were to: a) provide fair opportunities to potential participants, b) minimise the school teacher's involvement and their influence on young refugees' decisions due to their authority and power, and c) prevent the unintentional distortion of information about the project during the recruitment process.

The overall procedure was as follows. Class teachers first informed their students of the date, time and place for the information session, briefly introducing this project. In each of the three schools, I verbally explained the research, with a written information sheet, making use of a PowerPoint presentation. I then gave the students a couple of days before making a decision on their participation in the study. We exchanged contact details to keep in touch with each other before the next meeting. After the session, I converted the leaflet, consent form and PowerPoint slides into a PDF file and sent them to the potential participants by email. I also sent a notice of the upcoming meeting via instant messenger. It was interesting that all students responded to my short text message, whereas only two of them replied to my email. In particular, school 3 suggested that I recruit participants for the study from graduates who had recently finished at the school. A teacher sent an email including information of this project to graduates and she then arranged a meeting for an information briefing session. In school 1, nine students attended the information

session and decided to join the study, but one student changed her mind at the last moment and withdrew her research participation. This was because she would leave the school soon due to trouble with her mother. In school 3, two graduates came to the information session but one of the two students decided not to participate in the study as she was not able to commit to the project due to her busy schedule. I finally obtained consent from eight students from school 1, three students from school 2, and one student from school 3. The final sample of North Korean refugee students from three alternative schools is described in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Characteristics of the participants

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	School grade	School type	Length of attendance at school
1	Bada	22	Male	High school	State-accredited	1year
2	Chanseul	22	Male	High school	State-accredited	6months
3	Dabin	27	Female	High school	State-accredited	2years 6months
4	Dodam	19	Female	High school	State-accredited	6months
5	Gaon	18	Female	High school	State-accredited	4years
6	Haegil	17	Female	High school	State-accredited	7months
7	Jinsol	17	Female	High school	State-accredited	6months
8	Moa	17	Female	High school	State-accredited	1year
9	Mira	21	Female	Graduate (Feb. 2016)	Non- accredited	1year
10	Nurim	24	Male	High school	Non- accredited	1year
11	Parang	22	Male	High school	Non- accredited	2years
12	Suri	21	Female	High school	Non- accredited	2years

Ethical considerations

Turning now to research ethics involving young refugees, this section focuses on ethical considerations and practical issues identified in the study and my approaches to respecting young people's views and opinions during the research process.

Informed consent

As previously noted in chapter 2, it was not necessary for the current study to obtain additional ethical approval at a national or local level in South Korea. I, however, needed to ask for informed consent from both participants and their parents or legal guardians of participants aged under 18, in compliance with the Child Welfare Law in Korea. Informed consent is a central part of conducting ethical research (Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Gallagher, 2009; Hopkins, 2008) and I therefore had to obtain participants' consent prior to this being carried out. To do this, I held an information briefing session before participants decided to join the study. I provided information on the study and explained clearly that young people could dissent and withdraw from the research at any stage, without giving any reasons (British Educational Research Association, 2011; France, 2004). In addition, I made it clear that consent was voluntary and re-negotiable (Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group, 2012), so that participants could provide consent freely and voluntarily without duress. The consent was an on-going consideration throughout the research process (Ahsan, 2009; Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Hood et al., 1996; Wiles et al., 2008).

I was particularly conscious that this research included four female students under 18 (Gaon, Haegil, Jinsol and Moa) and it was therefore necessary to obtain informed consent from parents or those *in loco parentis* (Graham et al., 2013; Hopkins, 2008; Lewis, 2003). Here, I faced a practical challenge of asking their parents to complete the consent form in person. This was because Gaon, Haegil and Jinsol lived apart from parents and Moa was an unaccompanied refugee who had been separated from both parents. Therefore, parental consent was gained from a head teacher of a school that they belonged to because a head teacher was generally regarded as a legal

guardian in an alternative school setting for young North Korean refugees. In this sense, as described earlier, this study found that the importance of gatekeepers cannot be overlooked in research involving young refugees from North Korea. Although it is advisable for researchers to maintain a co-operative relationship, according to Bogolub and Thomas (2005) and Thomas and O’Kane (1998), I also needed to be sensitive in my relationships with participants and gatekeepers because the participation of young refugees in the research was more likely to be affected by adult gatekeepers’ authority or power (Hood et al., 1996; Masson, 2004; Morrow and Richard, 1996).

One of the important aspects of informed consent was that information was offered in a way suitable to young North Korean refugees so that they fully understood and made a decision about their participation in the research. To do this, I used a leaflet including the details of the research project in order to make the ideas feel familiar to the young people (see Appendix 3). Here it is worth noting that I used easy to understand Korean expressions, avoiding formal South Korean expressions or loanwords from English in all written materials, including the information sheet. According to previous research, young North Korean refugee participants may have difficulty in understanding research materials in which English or Chinese are used, due to the language differences as a result of the North Korean government banning people from using foreign languages (Kang, 2011). I also developed two cartoon-like characters and put them on the leaflet and used visual images in my PowerPoint presentation in order to help the young people understand the information about the study easily when holding an information briefing session. It is interesting to note that the university logo played an important role here. Bada asked me ‘*Are you studying here?*’ pointing at the logo and Chanseul and Nurim showed me their interest in the university. While this was a small thing in the whole process of the study, the participants’ reaction to the logo made me think about the importance of the researcher’s identification. Young people from refugee backgrounds might have negative experiences with some adults while going through their migration journey. Thus, they are likely to become suspicious of unidentified people. Of course, it may be important fundamentally to build a trusting relationship between the participant and the researcher. Chanseul started to talk about what was in his mind actively

around a month after this project started, saying '*now I can trust you completely*'. Nevertheless, by using the official university logo, it was possible to reassure them that I was a researcher working at a university.

It was also important to give participants plenty of time to read and understand the details of the leaflet and to ask questions about the study before completing the written consent form (Hopkins, 2008). To do this, I gave potential participants a couple of days to make a decision on their voluntary participation in the project after the information briefing session, before collecting informed consent forms (see Appendix 4). During the session, I aimed to pay particular attention to participants' non-verbal as well as verbal cues expressing any discomfort or refusal (Cree et al., 2002) and I also asked the potential participants whether they felt burdened by signatures on written consent forms or not. I tried to approach those young people in a range of appropriate ways in which they could express their opinions freely, remembering that the main focus of obtaining consent is on 'the process of helping participants to understand the research project', not 'the products of consent' (Gallagher et al., 2010, p.477).

In terms of taking photographs, it was necessary to manage the issues of copyright and people in images. I therefore obtained consent for the use of images from participants and I also asked participants to explain the purpose to non-participants and gain permission from them before taking photographs when they intended to take images of people (Wiles et al., 2008). Participants were also asked to explain to non-participants the use of photos for group discussions, presentations and publications. The importance of gaining permission from children's parents when they intended to take photos of children under the age of 18 was emphasised. All of the participants involved in the photo task agreed with my use of any photographs that they had submitted for academic purposes, such as my PhD thesis, conference presentations and publications, as well as photo exhibitions. This study collected four photos including people and the participants who took a photo of people gained consent from them. It was reported by participants that people in the photo asked them to take their appearance from the back or the side instead of the front.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality were another core aspect of the ethical issues considered (Wiles et al., 2008). Participants were assured of my commitment as a researcher to ensuring confidentiality, not only regarding their personal information and specific details that might make participants identifiable, but also what participants had produced in the research process, such as accounts and photos (Morrow, 2008). Ethics guidelines advise that the names of individuals and places are disguised in the research to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. I therefore provided participants with an opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. To protect confidentiality, data generated during the study, including photographs, were securely stored in electronic form with a protective code on my computer and any printed materials were locked in a filing container to which only the researcher had access. Data access is limited to only my academic supervisors and me. Recording files will be deleted after the completion of the PhD project and the anonymised data and transcripts will be retained for possible publications in the future. With regard to photographs, I will retain some photos that participants agreed could be used for academic purposes. The personal data and other photos will not be retained beyond the pre-set period, which would be three years, following the recommendation of the Korea National Institute for Bioethics Policy and the Personal Data Protection Act in Korea.

Meanwhile, I informed the participants of the limits to confidentiality that might arise in some circumstances (Abebe; 2009; Graham et al., 2013; International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2016), such as when I noticed any risk of being harmed in participants' accounts. With regard to disclosure of participants' harmful situations, there are different opinions and practices (Cashmore, 2006). Some would disclose the perceived risk or harm (Lynch et al., 1999, cited in Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group, 2012), while others keep confidentiality until they discuss these with participants and obtain their consent (Hill, 2006). In the present study, participants were informed that I would make a disclosure of participants' harm or abuse noticed during the research process, following ethical guidelines by British Educational Research Association (2011). As

a researcher who employed listening directly to participants' experiences as a research method, I needed to be sensitive to child and youth protection issues while working with young North Korean refugees. I encountered those issues as the following example highlights.

One of participants said that she had been experiencing an on-going conflict with a housemother at her accommodation. She felt that she was treated coldly, and her requests were often ignored by the housemother. When listening to her situation, I approached the issue with two strategies. I discussed the situation with the participant first and then encouraged her to talk to her class teacher. I also suggested that I could tell the teacher in person if she had difficulty in mentioning it to the teacher. By doing so, I sought to minimise any risk of harm to the participant and to protect her privacy and respect her own opinion (Alderson, 1995). Unfortunately, she said that there was little improvement in the housemother's attitude although she had already talked about the problem to her teacher. I asked her again whether I could report the problem to the head of the school or not, but she did not want me to do that as she was planning to leave the accommodation soon at that time. Instead, as another strategy, I handed a list of appropriate supporting services to the participant (Ennew and Plateau, 2004; United Nations Children's Fund, 2006; Zimmerman and Watts, 2003). The information sheet included the names and contact details of sources of support, such as a free telephone help-line, counselling services and the homepage address of the National Child Protection Agency in Korea (see Appendix 5).

There were also some students who were still under stress caused by their traumatic experiences in the past or who often had nightmares. They said that these stressful situations sometimes led to trouble adjusting to school or conflicts among classmates. I thought that they needed counselling regularly to overcome the trauma, but it was difficult for me, as an individual researcher, to refer a participant to a professional counsellor without consulting with teachers in Korean school settings. Here, to be honest, I felt confused between being a researcher who needed to maintain a rigorous attitude and an ordinary person who wanted to help them. I had no choice but to be resigned to my limitations as a temporary visiting researcher. At this time, I felt frustrated, although they seemed to understand my situation and did not ask anything

of me. Thankfully, at the final stage of the study, some said that they experienced self-healing while telling their own stories and expressed their thanks to me for listening to them. Meanwhile, it seemed that some paid attention to keeping confidentiality, for example, asking me, ‘*This is going to be published in English, isn’t this?*’ (Chanseul), ‘*Will you write what I say in English? Can Koreans read your paper as well?*’ (Nurim), or one said, ‘*Please keep it a secret*’ (Suri). Dodam confirmed it frequently not to identify her in the final paper of the project.

Protection from harm and distress

Researchers should recognise the possibility of physical harm or emotional distress that participants may experience throughout the research process. It is also necessary to make efforts to avoid or reduce harmful and stressful situations and to make participants feel comfortable and relaxed in the research process (British Educational Research Association, 2011). Taking into consideration the status of my participants as North Korean refugees, it was expected that the young people might have felt discomfort or stress when they dealt with sensitive topics, such as sexual abuse, family break-up, or parental separation. I therefore had to pay particular attention and assure participants that they could avoid specific questions that they were reluctant to answer and withdraw from the research at any time without any specific reasons. It was also important to recognise that the young people might express their feelings or thoughts in other ways, not only in words. In particular, I learnt how to manage a participant’s silence from my pilot study. For example,

Researcher: Can you tell me what the teacher-student relationship means to you?

Participant:

Researcher: I mean,

Participant: I know what you mean. Please let me think over the question before giving my answer.

In this situation, I should have given the participant enough time to think about the question and form his own answer. I, however, did not perceive his intention in

having a pause and just tried to help the participant understand the question by providing an additional explanation. I also encountered ‘iced moments’ that we were silent at the same time several times during the interview. After this interview, I analysed my speaking style, such as speed, reaction and tone of voice, by listening to the recording file repeatedly. I found that I sometimes began to speak right after the participant finished what he was saying, or even before he wrapped up what he was saying. After this experience, I made every effort to understand the underlying cause of a participants’ silence in order to react appropriately and to wait until they were prepared to talk again. Fundamentally, I realised that by far the most important thing for me as a researcher was to build up mutual trust with my participants and to be a sympathetic listener by showing respectful attitudes toward the young people.

Using Photovoice

The main fieldwork was carried out between October 2016 and February 2017. The Photovoice project, titled Show Me Your Voice!, was conducted over a period of three months in late 2016. The name of the project was made for the purpose of approaching young refugees in a friendly way and to interestingly convey the meaning of ‘have your voice heard through photographs’. 12 young North Korean refugees, ranging in age 17-27 years, participated in the study. Among them, eight participants completed all phases of Photovoice activity, from training session to photo exhibition and two participants did not have a public photo exhibition. Another two participants opted out of the photo task and took part in only individual interviews. They showed interest in telling their own stories but expressed the taking photographs as a burden. I assured them that this study focused on what young refugee participants felt comfortable with, whether talking about their experiences or taking photos. Overall, it was revealed that Photovoice was used as a means of facilitating participants’ speech more actively.

Introduction and training session

Participants were first invited to a training session for the Photovoice project. I distributed a short training workbook and made a PowerPoint presentation to help

participants understand the photo task. The training session began by briefly outlining the study and participants were guided through a presentation, including background information about Photovoice, the procedure of the Photovoice project, and a discussion of anticipated practical and ethical issues. After that, they had a free-associating session about their school experiences, which is the main research topic, and we also made ground rules that participants needed to bear in mind. Subsequently, participants formed a group for discussion of their photos. Here, I gave participants an opportunity to choose an appropriate option depending on their preferences. Following a lesson from the pilot study (see chapter 3), participants were given a few possible options about how to record their reflections during the project. All participants agreed to having a review session at the end of each meeting, not as an independent session, and to use a text message or an email for sending additional feedback. The reviewing sessions were run as informal and on-going sessions, as most participants were willing to express their opinions on the research process.

In school 1, a total of eight students finally agreed to join the project and the school was fully supportive of the research project. A seminar room with a beam projector and a computer was assigned for the study. A female teacher was also appointed as an assistant and I was therefore able to discuss with her any practical issues associated with the project. For example, it was not easy for eight students to arrange a time for a meeting as each of them had different schedules, both inside and outside school. Thanks to the teacher's help, the Photovoice project took place during regular extra-curricular activity times in the school and hence all the participants were able to take part in the group activity. They all agreed that they would do the Photovoice as a group activity first and then participate in one-to-one interviews additionally afterwards. In each of schools 2 and 3, two participants took part in doing the photo task individually. These training sessions lasted an average of two and a half hours.

Photo-task session

After the training sessions, participants were given approximately one or two weeks to take photographs. They documented through their photos their experiences of

alternative school and the successes and challenges that they had experienced in their schools. They chose one or two meaningful photos and talked about them in a group or a one-to-one setting. The participants interacted with each other as well as the researcher and each participant had an opportunity to explain his/her photos and to ask questions about, or comment on, the photos that other participants had taken.

To elicit participants' perceptions and experiences in their photos, I used the PHOTO method as a basic format to guide discussion (Hussey, 2006). The PHOTO acronym stands for: 1) Describe your **p**icture; 2) What is **h**appening in your picture?; 3) Why did you take a picture **o**f this?; 4) What does this picture **t**ell us about your life?; 5) How can this picture provide **o**pportunities for us to improve life? This questioning format was helpful for photo elicitation, whereas discussions were held flexibly beyond the questions in order for participants to talk freely and discuss actively. In this study, all of the ten young people who participated in the photo-task sessions were more enthusiastic about telling their stories than I had anticipated. Thus, it was not necessary in the study to ask the entire questions of the PHOTO method in order.

In the group discussions, each participant had a chance to share their thoughts and opinions, show their photos, and they then had interactive talk through free-flow discussion. It was interesting that one photo sometimes played a role as a trigger for a spirited discussion among young people. For example, Jinsol showed us a picture about her experience of attending a public lecture. Others then started to talk about their own experiences and views about that kind of school programme organised for enhancing students' understanding of South Korea. Spontaneously, the discussion was extended to talk about vocational experiences. In another case, Dodam told about her staying at a group home with a photo of her desk and bed space in the room. After that, others continued to talk about their experiences of accommodation.

This photo task was conducted over two sessions and each session lasted about two and a half, to three hours in a group and around two hours in a one-to-one setting. One-to-one activities took longer than I expected at the outset of the study. This may be because each participant and I were able to cover other relevant topics implicitly and explicitly regardless of the order of the interview schedule while talking about

the photos. In common with the pilot study, two young people who chose a one-to-one setting were more likely to talk freely about their personal experiences in the South and the North than those who were in a group setting. I therefore undertook additional one-to-one interviews in order to give students who participated group discussions an opportunity to talk more freely without minding others. On the contrary, Dodam and Moa were less active in an individual setting than in a group setting.

It seems surprising that none of the participants showed any sense of unfamiliarity with this kind of photo-task. This may be because they were already accustomed to taking pictures with their smartphones and posting photos online. On the other hand, four young people (Dodam, Gaon, Jinsol and Moa) tended to focus on taking a photo itself or felt burdened by taking ‘appropriate’ photos although they also expressed positively their interest in this photo task. Haegil (aged 17) often sent me her photos by a messenger before a group discussion and asked me ‘*Is this right?*’ and ‘*I am not sure whether this way is right or not*’. Gaon (aged 18) downloaded a photo of sky from the Internet and brought it to the first group discussion, saying ‘*I wanted to take a photo of sky but it was not clear as I am not good at taking photos*’. Jinsol (aged 17) took a picture of her work experience at a hair shop and she then edited the photo with clip art, using a popular application among teenagers. Dodam (aged 19) sent me four photos taken at the same place from four different angles, asking me ‘*Can you choose an appropriate one among these?*’. It may be another interesting aspect that all of the four were young teenage women.

Picture 4.1 Photos about which participants asked questions



(Dabin, Downloaded image)



(Jinsol, Added clip art on the photo)

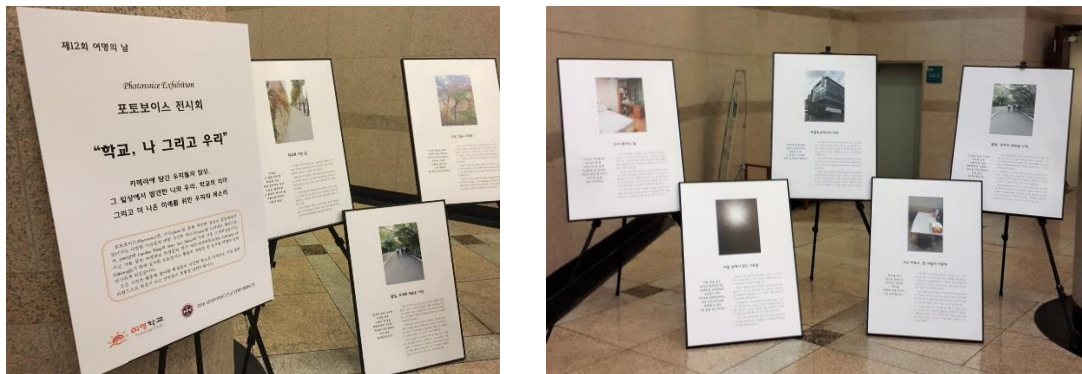
I re-explained the main aim of the photo-task session and asked them again not to feel any burden in taking an appropriate photo. I also reassured them that they did not need to be involved in the photo-task session if they did not want to and they could participate only in interviews. I said that the quality of the photo itself was not important, but it was necessary to take a 'real' thing as it is, not using a photo-shop application or any other applications or adding clip art. In particular, I made a request again for attention to copyright issues. After this, these young women appeared to enjoy the photo-task session actively and completed all sessions. Another technical issue was found in the process of sending photos by a messenger. The original size of photos was shrunk to save memory when they sent them by a mobile phone messenger. I did not notice this until starting to prepare for the photo exhibition. While these kinds of issues were not found in previous research using Photovoice, it needs to be considered in a new research context working with the IT generation of young people.

Photo exhibition

As the final part of the Photovoice project, we held an exhibition of photographs that participants had taken and interpreted during the sessions. At the initial stage of the

study, this photo exhibition was planned to be held flexibly depending on the situation of the research sites and participants' preferences. Fortunately, the Photovoice exhibition was initially set up by a head teacher of a school. She suggested I hold a photo exhibition in public and then provided the venue, tools, helpers and financial assistance needed to display the photos that participants had produced through the project. The preparation of the exhibition was begun by selecting the most meaningful photos. Participants made a caption to verbally represent their views and experiences of schooling, as some participants felt difficulty in writing literary Korean. I recorded the verbal captions and edited them for making photo frames with a computer. A professional newspaper editor helped me organise the photos to have the participants' voices heard effectively. The photos were on display in the lobby of a local church for a day when teachers, parents, volunteers, sponsors and education officials associated with alternative schools for young North Korean refugees got together at the church. They were invited to view the photographs and read the young refugees' stories. Participants played an active role in guiding guests and explaining their photos in the exhibition.

Picture 4.2 Photovoice exhibition



There was a positive outcome from the exhibition that I had not expected at the start of the project. Despite my concerns that participants might feel burdened by spending extra time, they participated very actively in preparing for the exhibition. They mostly looked pleased to organise the exhibition and to display their own photos. It was impressive that all the participants were willing to explain their photos to visitors, saying confidently '*This is my photo and ...*'. In a reviewing session after

the exhibition, most participants reported that they felt a strong sense of achievement and empowerment in having their voices heard in public through the photographs and they felt proud of themselves in the exhibition. This exhibition made another contribution in helping South Koreans have a positive view of refugee students from North Korea. Some of the audience showed interest in doing Photovoice as a relatively new approach in the South Korean school context. One school teacher sent me an email with her feedback on the exhibition afterwards.

... Most of all, I was very impressed with the students' enthusiastic attitudes. They looked so confident when telling me actively about their own photos. I did not know they were such bright and talented students. They looked different from themselves in a classroom. I indeed found what is inside their hearts from the photos. I hope that this photo exhibition will be held next year as well.

(Extracted from a teacher's email)

The following section of this chapter moves on to discuss in more detail the elements that influenced the research.

Facilitators and barriers in listening to young people

This study identified a range of elements acting as facilitators or barriers in listening to young people throughout the research process. This is now discussed below.

Using photographs

Drawing on Photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1997), young North Korean refugee participants were asked to take photos and talk about their views and experiences. It was found that I was able to make a connection between my research aims and questions and what participants wanted to say. Photos were a good starting point for our conversation. This was found in the main study as well as the pilot study and reflected the findings of previous studies in which photographs played a role as a trigger (Dempsey, 2014), an intermediary method (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), and a powerful medium of self-expression (Hays et al., 2009).

To help participants talk freely, as seen in the example of four young women earlier, it was necessary to reduce the burden of taking photos, by clarifying that speaking was more important than the photos themselves. One-to-one interviews were carried out additionally in order to obtain deep and detailed data in the main study. I was also careful not to interpret or assume the meanings of their photos before listening to their voices.

Cultural and institutional factors

During the study, it sometimes seemed that young people's participation and having their own voices were influenced by cultural factors. Some young people asked for my thoughts rather than giving their own opinions, even though they fully agreed on the necessity of having their voices heard more directly. Contrary to my initial expectation that participants would easily choose their own pseudonyms, some spent quite a time doing this kind of activity, asking about my opinion, saying, for example, *'Do you want me to make my name in English or in Korean?'* and *'Which one do you prefer, this one or this one?'*. Some asked me to choose their names on their behalf. It may be that the young people tended to be unaccustomed to working collaboratively with someone who was regarded as an authority figure. In addition, some showed very careful attitudes to what they said in a group setting. This may be understood in the light of Confucianism where adult authority is emphasised (Yang, 2009) and a 'high-context culture' placing stress on relations among people (Hall, 1976, cited in Kim et al., 1998). Within these cultural backgrounds, young people may be unwilling to initiate discussion and rely on adults to make decisions. This was common among older students (Bada, Chanseul and Parang aged 22, Dabin aged 27, and Nurim aged 24). In addition, their previous experiences with North Korean teachers may have affected their attitudes towards making a decision at school. For example, they said, *'I never said 'no' to my teacher in North Korea'* (Dabin), and *'No students were allowed to express opposite views to the teachers in North Korea'* (Nurim). It is also interesting that all the young men (Bada, Chanseul, Nurim and Parang) were included in this group. Therefore, it may be seen by these findings that older students and male students are more likely to be familiar with a hierarchical

relationship with authoritarian figures due to the influence of culture or their previous education in North Korea.

There was little recognition of participatory research and it was seen as a relatively new approach among Korean school teachers, which presented another barrier that I needed to overcome in the study. When I had a meeting with teachers working at a school, one of them did not agree with my intention of adopting a participatory approach. She said that she could agree with the necessity for a participatory approach to listen to young people's voices theoretically. She, however, took a sceptical attitude towards my methodological approach, criticising that it would be difficult to obtain meaningful data in this way. I needed to recognise that the concept of listening to young people's voices and young people's active participation in research might not be familiar to Korean teachers. More seriously, she expressed her doubts about the feasibility of the participatory research involving young North Korean refugees, using the negative expressions that they tend to '*stick to nothing*' and '*often break their word*'. This unexpected response made me embarrassed as I had already heard how much she loved her students and worked for them for a long time. From this experience, I found an ambivalent view that South Korean teachers may have towards North Korean refugee students. Of course, it may be hard to generalise one teacher's view to all teachers in the field. Nevertheless, the experience led me to think that future research on teachers' views on students from North Korean refugee backgrounds may be needed and teachers' voices may also be as important as students' voices.

I needed to find a way to overcome this unexpected barrier, even though I felt very disappointed and frustrated over the meeting. After that, I kept contacting the teachers by email and phone calls and sent a summary of several articles about research with young refugees from other countries. Finally, the teachers changed their attitudes toward the study and gave me the opportunity to work with refugee students from the school.

Trusting relationships

As noted earlier, the research needed to be mindful of the likelihood that young refugees from North Korea may have had negative experiences with some adults while on their migration journey and, thus, would be more likely to become suspicious of unidentified people. In the current study, I, as the researcher, was introduced to participants officially by their school teachers. Nevertheless, it was found that ‘making a trusting relationship’ might be different from confirming my physical identification. It also took a longer time than I had planned to build a trusting relationship with participants. For example, at the initial stage of the photo-task sessions, Chanseul did not participate actively and just kept silent before he took a turn in talking in group discussions. Around a month after we met each other, he first voluntarily talked about what was on his mind:

To be honest, I suspected that you were an investigator disguised as a researcher and that the police office sent you to look at our lives in school. I also doubted your motives and efforts to get close to me. But now I can trust you completely as I felt your sincerity in approaching me.

(Chanseul, interview)

Although I cannot find any research evidence that this is a typical concern among young North Korean refugees, at least Chanseul, Parang and Suri showed similar patterns of reaction, using the word of *jeop-geun-ha-da* (meaning ‘approach’) with a negative nuance, unlike others who used the words *man-na-da* (meaning ‘meet’) or *bang-mun-ha-da* (meaning ‘visit’). The study did not find what factors influence this kind of suspicious attitude. Nevertheless, this finding may indicate that developing a trusting relationship is an important starting point for listening to young people’s voices and it should not be overlooked when working with young people who may have had negative experiences with adults. It was also found that two-way communication could be an effective way of respecting young people’s voices and thereby establishing trust with each other. In this study, it was important to make sure that listening to young people did not mean accepting their opinions and views unconditionally. Instead, I highlighted ‘*working together*’, ‘*making an agreement before making a decision*’, and ‘*mutual understanding and respect*’. I tried to ask the

participants even about trivial things so that we made ‘our’ best choice together. I did not have any special actions or skills except for ‘asking’ and ‘listening’. From the experience, I would suggest that adults can respect children and young people just by asking their opinions and listening to them.

Mirroring the researcher as a listener

Throughout the overall process of the study, I experienced and realised that a researcher is an important research instrument. In other words, I found myself sometimes becoming a facilitator in, or a barrier to, listening to young people’s voices. Most of all, feeling physically tired hindered me from focusing on their voices. It usually took two to three hours, and sometimes more than four hours to interview each participant individually. I made my efforts to help young refugee participants engage in interviews comfortably by having a conversation including everyday topics rather than by going directly to the research topic. Most participants, though not all, were enthusiastic about participating in interviews. While their willingness to talk about themselves was very welcome, I felt tired or sometimes even had headaches after focusing for such long interviews.

Being patient was another challenging aspect for me in the research process. It was usual to wait for responses from schools, teachers, and young people. Some participants often changed the time and place, or even texted me to cancel a meeting just ten minutes before we were supposed to meet. Whenever my initial plan was delayed due to unexpected events, I was concerned about the delay in the progress of the study. I also felt the pressure of spending time in listening again and again to audio recordings of long interviews for data analysis and reading the dense transcripts. Here, one experience helped me realise that impatience or haste may be a barrier to listen to young people’s voices. When I started to feel impatient due to what I saw as delayed progress, I luckily had enough time to discuss these frustrations with my supervisors before going into the data analysis stage. After this, I came to enjoy my work, feeling less burdened from managing the data. Most of all, I had previously tended to approach the data as just ‘data’ in a narrow way, focusing on completing my thesis. Thanks to the advice from my supervisors, I became more

interested in my data as young people's voices, not just as a product of the fieldwork. I found the work I had done more fruitful when I changed my attitude towards my data. Of course, it was still important to be academic and rigorous as a researcher.

Another challenge I encountered as a listener was feeling tired emotionally. Emotional engagement is an important consideration for researchers (Emerald and Carpenter, 2015). It was challenging for me to keep a proper tension between being a rigorous researcher and a sympathetic listener. I sometimes felt upset or depressed when listening to the young people's tragic stories, or frustrated when there was nothing that I was able to do to help them. A question still remains as to whether I acted properly as a researcher and as a listener. Nevertheless, I found in the study that empathy can be the most effective facilitator in listening to young people. Thankfully, all 12 young people were willing to talk about their experiences and views of alternative schools, and some even talked voluntarily about personal stories from the past to the present. They said, '*I have never had such an honest talk with someone*' (Chanseul), '*I have said what was deep inside me, and now I feel like I threw away a kind of load from my mind*' (Haegil). I am still questioning what made them use their voices actively and how valuable the participation in the study was to young North Korean refugees. I just tried to give them opportunities to talk about what they wanted and I made every effort to listen to them with the best of my ability. This may be understood by one young woman's heartfelt comment below.

I have never talked about myself honestly until now. I always had to lie to survive in North Korea and China. I always told lies about my name, family, background, and everything about myself. At one point, I felt like I lost myself. ... I never imagined myself expressing what I want. ... This maybe was the first time that I talked about my thoughts without any worries.

(Dabin, interview)

Summary

This chapter has been devoted to a more detailed description of methodological and ethical issues that I identified and addressed during the research process, including the researcher's self-reflection. To provide the rationale for adopting 'listening to young people's voices' as a main approach for the study and using a visual method,

Photovoice, as a way of collecting data, I discussed some findings from my review of the previous studies on young North Korean refugees. Although I sought for a research paradigm where young people were more respected and their voices were heard more, I encountered unexpected challenging situations while accessing and recruiting participants, mostly associated with gatekeepers of schools. A range of ethical issues – how to obtain consent from participants, how to secure anonymity and confidentiality, and protecting participants from harm and distress during the research process – that I considered and addressed while working with young refugee participants were also articulated in this chapter. I then illustrated the procedure of conducting the Photovoice project, including advantages and practical issues in using Photovoice. In particular, the photo exhibition had a positive influence not only on the young North Korean refugee participants of the study but also on the South Korean audience. The last section offered the researcher's reflection on the experience of undertaking this study, focusing on what were facilitators and barriers in listening to the voices of young North Korean refugees throughout the study.

Chapter 5 Findings: Experiences and views of alternative schools

Introduction

This study's aim was to examine the role of alternative schools in the integration into South Korean society of young North Korean refugees by exploring the young people's experiences of alternative schools. It was guided by the over-arching research questions:

- What are young North Korean refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools?
- How do they understand and experience challenges in their school settings?
- How do they understand and experience successes in their school settings?
- How does alternative school help or hinder their integration into South Korean society?

To address the research questions, I adopted a participatory research approach and used Photovoice, combined with one-to-one interviews, which enabled 12 young North Korean refugees to give voice to their experiences of schooling in the alternative education settings, while also enabling me to collect rich data from the participants. As outlined in chapter 3, the collected data were analysed thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This chapter presents the research findings and interpretations regarding the first research question: young North Korean refugees' overall experiences and views of alternative schools. The key finding that I examine here is that the 12 young people generally understood their experiences of alternative schools as a process of preparation for becoming integrated into a new society. Within this overarching theme of 'integration', my analysis of the findings revealed that the young refugees' school experiences fell into four sub-themes: education, future career,

accommodation and well-being. These sub-themes align with the domains of a 'means and markers' of refugee integration, suggested by Ager and Strang (2004; 2008). The present study also found that teachers were a significant factor, influencing the school experiences of the young people. I considered the findings about teachers as a part of sub-theme 'education' at the initial stage of analysing the data, but the amount and range of the accounts related to teachers were spread widely throughout the data. I finally decided to organise the findings on teachers as a separate section under the theme 'teacher influence'.

This chapter offers a rich and full account of North Korean refugee students' experiences and views of alternative schools, and also acts as a guiding chapter that leads us to understand the young people's successes and challenges in alternative school settings in the following chapter.

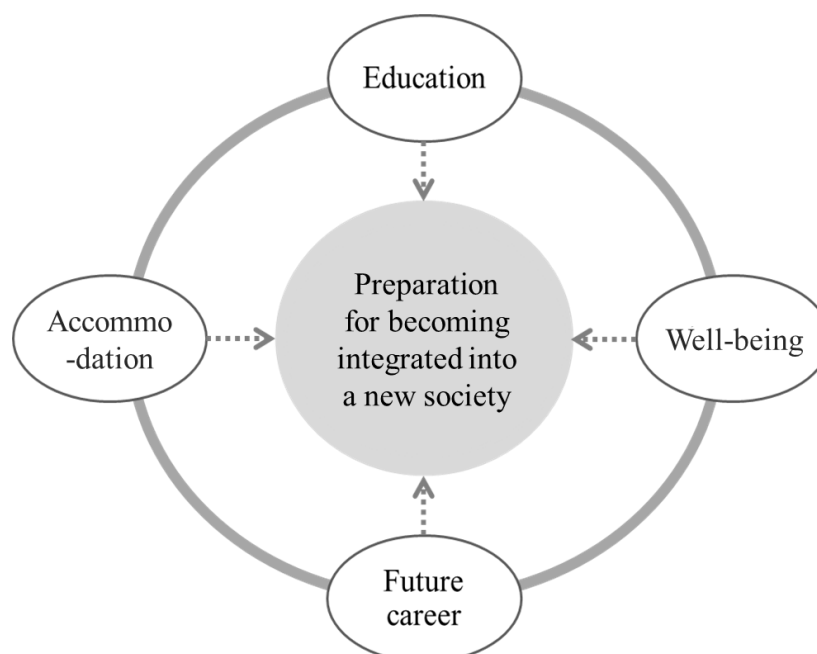
Schooling as a process of becoming integrated into a new society

As noted above, 12 young North Korean refugees viewed their experiences of alternative schools as a process of becoming integrated into a new society, South Korea, as independent citizens. They felt that, overall, the alternative schools offered proper support to help young refugees from North Korea settle well at an early stage and become integrated into South Korean society. This view was shared by all 12 participants, regardless of age, gender and school type. In particular, Nurim and Suri described more explicitly the role of alternative school associated with promoting young North Korean refugees' preparedness to be integrated into South Korean society, saying, for example, '*Alternative school looks like a link between 'an individual' called North Korean refugees and 'a society' called South Korea*' (Nurim), and '*I was often hurt by people's words and eyes looking at me and did not understand their attitudes in the early months. After coming to school, I had an understanding of South Korean society and so I came to know why they did what they did and what I should do*' (Suri). According to the accounts, it seemed to me that young North Korean refugees in South Korea tended to view integration into a new

society as a one-way process rather than a two-way integration (Atfield et al., 2007). This issue is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

The view of alternative school, as seen in the quotations from Nurim and Suri above, was identified in the data from other students' school experiences, which can be classified into four areas of life: education, future career, accommodation, and well-being. As mentioned, these four areas identified in the study are in line with the four domains that Ager and Strang (2004; 2008) suggest as means and markers of refugee integration. Atfield et al. (2007) also refer to those domains as the functional aspects of integration (see chapter 7). However, there is a difference in the role of school between the two prior research studies and my own current study. Alternative schools in this study encompass all four domains of life of young refugees (education, future career, accommodation, and well-being), whereas 'school' equates simply to 'education' in the other two studies. This is also discussed in more detail in chapter 7. As noted, the young refugees understood their experiences of each area as a process of preparation for becoming integrated into a new society as independent citizens, as presented in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Study participants' views of the experiences of alternative school



Education

Most young North Korean refugees in the current study, though not all, regarded education as a means by which they would be ready to live in South Korean society. They also thought that this could be achieved in their alternative schools. This is in line with other research which describes the role of school as being where refugee children and young people can experience the culture and norms of host countries (Anderson, 2004). All participants focused largely on study and academic achievement when they talked about schooling, although schools offered a wide variety of educational activities to improve cultural knowledge and social understandings of South Korean society. This tendency can be understood in the light of South Korean society's emphasis on academic achievement as one of the important factors influencing a successful life (Seth, 2002). In such a society, young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds are likely to consider getting a school diploma or going to a university as the most important aspect of preparation for successful integration as a member of the society. This is reflected in the reasons why the young refugees chose alternative schools, now discussed below.

Choosing an alternative school

Two of the 12 participants over school age (Dabin aged 27 and Parang aged 22), who had missed out on schooling, chose alternative school in order to have an opportunity to study. Each of them, therefore, started from the level of elementary school (Parang) and middle school (Dabin) respectively when they started at alternative schools. Dabin had no choice but to go to alternative school as she was already over the age of 24 when she was seeking to enroll at a school. According to the North Korean Refugees Protection and Settlement Support Act and the Enforcement Decree of the Act (in South Korea), persons under the age of 24 who have been admitted or transferred to a high school or below can be subject to educational support by the state (Ministry of Unification, 2014). She had recognised the educational situation she was in, which led her to choose an alternative school, as highlighted below.

It was very difficult to find an appropriate school for me after deciding to go to school. How could I study with teenage students in a same classroom? I had to start the course of middle school. ... Moreover, as I was over 24

years old at that time when I was looking for a school, I could not go to a general school no matter how much I wanted. I did not have any choice except for going to an alternative school.

(Dabin, interview)

In the quotation above, it is worth noting that her choice of alternative school was affected not only by the educational regulations for North Korean refugee students, but also by age-based hierarchy; one of the predominant cultural characteristics of the Korean context (Moon and Han, 2013). This also led some older students in the study to feel challenged by studying alongside younger students, as described in chapter 6.

Another reason for choosing alternative school was described by four female students of school age (Gaon aged 18, and Haegil, Jinsol and Moa aged 17). Although they were of an age when they could study at a general high school with South Korean peers (generally aged 17-19) who were a similar age to them, they chose alternative school in the knowledge that it was the best place to help improve their basic academic skills. Notably, three of the four had had earlier experience of general school. In the same vein, I also met a male student (Bada) and five female students (Gaon, Haegil, Jinsol, Mira and Suri) who had studied at general school before being enrolled at alternative school. They all mentioned that they had difficulty in catching up with the regular classes, due to their lack of basic academic skills and this drove them to leave the mainstream schools. For example, one told me:

I went to a regular school right after leaving Hanawon, but I struggled to keep up with my schoolwork because of my lack of knowledge about primary subjects. English and math were much too difficult for me. I did not have any foundation in these subjects at that time. I was not able to understand what teachers said in class and so I often dozed off in class.

(Gaon, interview)

Mira also indicated that it was hard for her to survive the competitive atmosphere and intensive cramming at high school which was chiefly focused on preparation for the university entrance exam.

Most South Korean students in general school go to *hagwon* (meaning ‘private educational institutes’) for further study after school. In addition, they prepare for the following class in advance there. ... School teachers move very quickly in class, saying “you have already learn this from *hagwon*?” I just used to skip to the next part without understanding it properly. ... Now, in this school, teachers explain things slowly with simple and easy textbooks until I fully understand it. I came to feel interested in studying after entering this school.

(Mira, interview)

In the same way that this participant felt it difficult to catch up with her class without additional private education, another five students also mentioned the pressure of getting involved in private education in general school settings. Under these circumstances, as they move up to the higher grade, North Korean refugee students are highly likely to struggle with study, especially at high school. In the larger context, the school dropout rate of North Korean refugee students from high school (6.1%) is higher than that of elementary school (0.6%) and middle school (2.3%) (Ministry of Education, 2017); so this is clearly an important issue.

In the case of unaccompanied refugees, the educational circumstances of South Korea are likely to make them vulnerable and marginalised in general school settings. Four young refugees with no parents (Dodam, Moa, Nurim and Parang) participated in the study. Two young women (Dodam and Moa) stated that they chose alternative school voluntarily in considering their disadvantageous status as an unaccompanied refugee, remarking ‘*As I arrived alone, it looked almost impossible for me to go to a mainstream school alone without support from my parents*’ (Dodam). Both students could receive educational support from the school instead of parents at alternative school. On the other hand, the other two young men (Nurim and Parang) did not express any disadvantages explicitly. Instead, they tended to describe their difficulties in education in more general terms, without focusing on their specific vulnerable situation. It may be difficult to say whether the difference between the young women and the young men was affected by gender or by age because of the limited number of samples of the study. Nevertheless, it would be worth considering the impact of gender in future research on how young refugees understand and express their disadvantages.

Support for learning

Most participants, though not all, viewed their experiences of learning at alternative school positively. Nine of the 12 participants (all but Chanseul, Dodam and Nurim) reported that they all experienced an academic improvement while studying at alternative schools. This group of nine was comprised of seven of the eight female students and two of the four male students. Regarding the type of school, three of the four participants from two non-accredited schools and six of the eight participants from a state-accredited school were included in this group. In other words, regardless of the type of school (state-accredited or non-accredited) and the age (school-age or over school-age) and gender (male or female), most young refugees in the study were satisfied overall with their study at alternative school. According to accounts from the young people, factors positively influencing their study were as follows: a) relatively easy textbooks edited by school teachers; b) teachers who tried to explain slowly and repeatedly; and c) classes that were streamed on the basis of students' academic ability.

All the six participants who had previous experiences of mainstream school (Bada, Gaon, Haegil, Jinsol, Mira and Nurim) emphasised the advantages of the support offered by alternative schools and how this was helpful in improving academic skills and ability, especially compared to their earlier experiences. In a group discussion, a young man commented:

One of good things in this school is that there are a lot of ways that we can study with the assistance of the school. In the general school, I had to study on my own after normal school hours. I needed a lot of money for private lessons but I did not have enough money for this. ... For me, it was difficult to understand without repetitive explanations but teachers in the general school did not do that only for me. It was hard to ask additional questions in class because all the students, except me, grasped what teachers were saying. ... Now, in this school, I can have extra classes after school as there are many volunteers who help our study.

(Bada, group discussion)

This study also found that alternative schools provided after-school programmes or one-to-one tutorials for the further development of refugee students' academic ability. It seems that these additional programmes helped students make up for what they

lacked in class. However, there was a different view on this support for learning from Dodam and Haegil. That is, while they were helped by easy-to-understand text books and class content edited for North Korean refugee students, they said, *'I felt discouraged and a loss of confidence when I did not fully understand this kind of basic-level textbook'* (Haegil), and *'I know what I learn at this school may be much less difficult than general school class. I am sometimes frustrated when I cannot understand such a relatively easy class'* (Dodam).

Across the three schools in the study (one state-accredited school and two non-accredited schools), this kind of academic support programme was mainly run by South Korean volunteers. Nine participants expressed their positive views that the programmes for academic support were helpful for study. For example,

Haegil: Here in this school, I can have one-to-one tutoring if I requested this.

Researcher: Everyone can have it on request?

Haegil: Almost everyone, but sometimes there is a waiting list for students who want to get it when the number of volunteers is insufficient.

Researcher: What do you mainly do in the one-to-one tutorial?

Haegil: The volunteer-teacher and I usually review class materials together, and ask and answer some questions. When I do not fully understand some parts of textbook, we revisit them. The teacher helps me in this way for one semester.

Researcher: What did you like best about this one-to-one tutorial?

Haegil: I can ask as many questions as I want. It would be impossible if I were in a regular school class.

(Haegil, interview)

In addition, two young men (Bada and Parang) and five young women (Dabin, Gaon, Moa, Mira and Suri) also spoke positively about the opportunities that they had to ask questions, as many as they want, in one-to-one settings. This kind of academic support offered by the schools was strongly emphasised by three of the eight participants who had previously attended general schools, with Bada remarking, *'At this school, there are many ways students can study without worry about money'*, Haegil saying *'Where else can we receive this high-quality education without any payment?'*, and Gaon noting that *'Students who have never been to general school*

before tended to take this support for granted, but we should appreciate the support. As noted earlier, studying in South Korea seems to be closely connected to financial issues and it was hard for them to access private lessons without any payment at general school. The young people felt thankful to receive a range of academic support for free from their alternative schools.

Of course, this kind of academic support for North Korean refugee students, such as additional lessons after school or one-to-one tutorials, is found in general school settings as well (Kim et al., 2015). However, Mira explained that the academic support programme in a general school was less helpful and less effective for her at that time because the volunteer teacher *‘often cancelled the meeting’* and the school *‘did not continue a follow-up check of the tutorial properly’*. This finding is from only one participant and, hence, it would be hard to say that this finding reflects all mainstream school settings. In addition, this is not just an issue for general school settings but is also found in some of alternative schools settings (Cho, 2013; Park, 2012), although school teachers are more directly involved in the recruitment of volunteers and the management of the whole programme at alternative schools than at general schools. Nevertheless, the young woman’s comment suggests that it would be helpful to undertake future research in order to examine how effective those state-offered programmes are for North Korean refugee students at general schools, identifying the gaps between policy and practice. While more support policies and programmes by the state have been introduced for North Korean refugee students in general schools than those in alternative schools, little attention is still paid to the young people’s perceptions and experiences of the implementation of the policies in practice.

Education for enhancing social understanding

This study also found that the three alternative schools in the study provide educational opportunities for young North Korean refugees to enhance their understanding of South Korean society. Examples included meetings with South Korean experts in diverse fields, or special lectures organised by the government, NGOs or local enterprises. However, five of the 12 participants commented that this

kind of special programme was less useful in practice than they expected. For instance:

Picture 5.1 Excerpt from Photovoice (1)



I took this picture when we listened to a lecture about financial management at a local bank. ... This was so boring and most students were drowsy or thinking about something else. To be honest, the lecture sounded too far away from our real life. Most lectures are similar to this one.

(Jinsol, photo-task session)

Jinsol felt that the lecture was '*boring*' and '*too far away from our real life*'. In a similar way, Moa also said that '*Getting a job or going to a university, these things are actually hitting us in the face but most special lectures are not directly related to our real concerns*'. In addition, the present study found that young North Korean refugees may attend the lectures for money-related reasons.

There are hundreds of lectures that invite young North Korean refugees like us. In fact, it would be hard to get useful information for us from those lectures. One of the main reasons why we go there is because they give us money or a voucher. You probably wouldn't be able to find anyone who is really interested in the lecture itself. ... I went to a lecture about the job world after the unification of two Koreas. I actually cannot understand why they chose that kind of topic. I just attended the lecture because they gave us money.

(Bada, group discussion)

The students from a state-accredited school raised doubts about the effectiveness of these kinds of seminars or special lectures, even though they understood that the programmes were organised to help them improve their understanding of, and achieve successful adjustment to, South Korean society. Only one participant (Nurim) from a non-accredited school talked about his participation in a programme for social development. He took part in a book club regularly, saying, '*I was able to learn*

about South Korean society while taking part in the book club, but, more importantly I met a person who became my mentor here'. For Nurim, the book club was a meaningful place where he met a significant person as well as learnt about the country he had arrived in. This book club was organised by a local company as a social welfare business with the purpose of matching a South Korean mentor to a young North Korean refugee. His experience of the book club is examined again in the next chapter.

Improving English skills

Although I did not intend to explore the topic of the young people's English skills at the outset of the study, the findings revealed how important this issue was for the participants. While the acquisition of the host-country language has frequently emerged as an important topic in the field of research on refugee children and young people (Hastings, 2012; Lerner, 2012; Taylor and Sidhu, 2012), in the current study with young North Korean refugees residing in South Korea, no participants mentioned any difficulty in using Korean in their daily communication, apart from Dabin and Moa who had had a relatively long period of residence in China before entering South Korea. This is because both Koreas use the same language, although North Koreans can be distinguished by a Northern province dialect and accent and specific expressions that they use. All participants reported that they still encountered some challenges when using academic and literary language, especially in reading and writing. However, another type of language issue, which was associated with using English, not Korean, was revealed in the study.

English is neither an official language nor the mother language in South Korea. Nevertheless, all participants emphasised the necessity of learning English for their successful integration into South Korean society. For instance, two young men (Chanseul aged 22 and Nurim aged 24) had already finished high school in North Korea. However they decided to go to school for additional study, particularly focusing on learning English. In an interview with Nurim, he said:

Nurim: When I was at Hanawon, some teachers from several schools came and introduced their schools to us. I thought this school would be appropriate for me at that time.

Researcher: Could you tell me why you thought so?

Nurim: Many of the students in the school were as old as, or even older than me. I thought I could get much help from the school.

Researcher: So did you get as much help as you expected?

Nurim: Yes, of course, the teachers always tried to help us. Especially, I wanted to learn English properly. I heard English skills are important if I would like to get a good job in South Korea. In this sense, I can say that I got a lot of help from the school. I was able to learn English step by step, from a basic level.

(Nurim, interview)

Chanseul also indicated that English was an essential skill for his successful adjustment to South Korean society.

I would like to master English as soon as possible. That is the main reason why I am here. I have been thinking, since I was at Hanawon, that I should learn English to settle in South Korea because English seems to be very important here. So I always think about how I can develop my English skills more quickly.

(Chanseul, interview)

Chanseul's comment above may be understood in the light of the widespread use of English and loanwords from English in everyday life in South Korea, in contrast to North Korea where there is a strong emphasis on the use of 'pure' Korean words. According to one estimate, 30.9% of the signboards in 13 cities of Korea are written in borrowed or non-Korean words, 85% of which is in English (Noh et al., 2016). Therefore, this presents an additional challenge for young people from North Korea in adjusting to South Korean society:

I was so embarrassed right after coming out from Hanawon. Almost everything had an English name – apartments, restaurant menus, shops on the streets and so on. I always felt how important English was here and it was quite stressful for me. I thought I would be a fool if I did not know English.

(Dabin, interview)

The comments above highlight the importance of learning English from the initial stage of settlement (Chanseul and Nurim) and a strong sense of the necessity of this

(Dabin). Existing studies of refugees identify the importance of being able to speak the main language of the host country and the barriers of insufficient language capabilities in the process of integration into a new community (Block et al., 2014; McBrien, 2005). Unlike other groups of refugees, English, not the main language of Korea, seems to be considered a primary factor for their successful integration among young people from North Korea. Indeed, ten of the 12 participants mentioned English as the most important but difficult subject at school. They also thought that developing English skills was essential for getting a good job or for attending university in South Korea. I also felt their interest in learning English in person while conducting the fieldwork with the young people. Most participants often asked me how I developed my English skills and communicated with native speakers in an English speaking country. This personal experience played a useful role as a connecting point between the researcher and the participants. This is because the participants and I were able to get close to each other in a more relaxed setting while talking about my study experience in the UK.

Future Career

The participants in the study comprised 11 young people of high school level and one who had already finished school. Most of the eleven will finish school soon and go on to university or get a job in the near future. Seven of the 12 participants were in their twenties (Bada, Chaseul, Dabin, Mira, Nurim, Parang and Suri).

Understandably then, plans for a future career were a primary concern as well as an interest to the young people. All of the participants regarded employment as a key milestone in the process of integration into South Korean society as independent citizens. It is interesting that they were all thinking of going to a university first, rather than getting a job after graduation from school, in order to get a better salary and a more stable job later on. Two of the 12 participants (Chanseul and Dabin) used to work at a small factory before becoming a student in South Korea. In the light of their earlier experiences of employment, they both thought that they were unlikely to be able to do what they want to do in the future if they did not have a university diploma.

In the current study, young people from North Korea tried to look for, and prepare for, future careers with the help of the schools through, for example, work experience at a local enterprise or preparing for getting a professional qualification. All of the eight participants from a state-accredited school and one participant from a non-accredited school talked about this kind of work experience offered by the schools. The patterns of work experience varied according to how teachers arranged or organised the programme. Sometimes all the students had a visit together to the same workplace or sometimes each student chose a specific job or a place where they wanted to gain some experience. The work experience was run once or twice a year with the help of local companies. In so doing, they received useful information and practical tips about various fields of work and learned about potential new areas for future careers. For example, Chanseul said, *'I never thought about hotel-related jobs before participating in the job experience. ... I came to know about that field and I thought about getting a job in a hotel'*. It may not be easy for young North Korean refugees to access a variety of job areas at an individual level without the institutional help from school. Therefore, it seems that this job experience can help the young people explore potential job areas, even though most of the experiences are run in a form of a one-off visit.

There was a single case of a male student from a non-accredited school (Parang) who had an opportunity to work for a certain period. He gained a foothold for his future employment by thinking about what he really wanted to do and why he wanted to do the work. He was able to identify his possible future career and decided to study a specific field at a university in order to achieve his dream.

I would like to go back to North Korea and offer healthy food to people to improve health. In my hometown, the food quality was not good and many children suffered from nutrition shortage. I always feel sorry for my family, relatives, and friends in North Korea as I stay well and healthy in South Korea, eating a variety of good food. ... The other day, the school introduced me to a company and I there experienced the pork industry. I took part in person in rearing pigs and making meat products while working at the company for around one month. I thought how this pork industry could help North Koreans and how I could do it. ... I became motivated to study harder.

(Parang, interview)

By learning about the pork industry, he was able to draw an outline of his future career and this finally led him to apply to a veterinary school. He was more motivated to study hard to achieve his dream after participating in the vocational experience. However, not all of the participants were able to work at a company in person like him. Four young people (Bada, Gaon, Haegil and Moa) had critical views of the work experience programmes, saying, for example, *‘It would be more helpful if we could do something in person. ... For instance, if we go to a restaurant for a job experience, how about seeing chefs cook in the kitchen?’* (Moa). Unlike the case of Parang above, as noted earlier, most of the work experiences tend to be run as a one-off event, providing a brief introduction to the job. The four, however, preferred to work in the field for a certain period, as in the case of Parang, rather than participate in a one-off event. Taking into account that the majority of North Korean refugee students in alternative schools are over school age, seeking a job is highly likely to be a practical issue for them. Therefore, a work experience programme needs to be further developed to help them practically, beyond currently introducing a variety of jobs.

Here, there is another important point which emerges from the findings. Five of the eight students from a state-accredited school noted that teachers recommended that they thought about working in specific fields of work, such as cooking (Bada and Haegil) or hairdressing (Jinsol), social work (Dodam), or Chinese-related jobs, such as trade with China or Korean-Chinese translation (Dabin). In practice, this tendency for choosing jobs is reflected in the statistics on college choices of North Korean refugee students (Jang et al., 2017). However, this trend in choosing a job among young North Korean refugees may hinder students from thinking more about the future career that they really want to do. Therefore, the young refugees should be encouraged to broaden their horizons and school teachers should raise their aspirations for them.

It is worth noting that there is a special funding scheme to help students prepare for professional qualification. This kind of financial assistance normally comes from various organisations, such as NGOs, local companies, local churches or other individual sponsors. Of course, there are some funding schemes at the level of state

and local government, but this is still limited to alternative schools, according to a head teacher from a school in the study.

Gaon and Haegil reported that, with the financial aid for extra private lessons, they received a professional qualification in computer skills and cooking respectively. This practical help was seen as valuable. Gaon said, '*If I had not received this funding, I could not have taken these computer lessons*'. Nearly all (11 of the 12) participants talked about the challenges of living on a very tight budget and how hard it is to set aside extra money for preparing for their future employment. Only one (Chanseul) saved some money while working at a factory before enrolling in his school and he was therefore able to use his own money to learn computer skills and gain a qualification in it.

Accommodation

Although I did not set out in my study to specifically explore accommodation, I soon came to realise its key importance for these young refugees and how it related to experiences of success and challenge in education. Housing has long been considered as a factor influencing refugees' physical and emotional well-being (see, for example, Ager and Strang, 2008). The three alternative schools offered accommodation to their students from North Korean refugee backgrounds without any additional payment. At the time the study was being undertaken, eight young people were living in student accommodation offered by the schools. The school rents a house and around ten students live together there with a housemother appointed by the school. However, two of the eight participants moved out from the student accommodation at the end of the study and each of them are currently living with their mother and sister (Haegil) and their friend (Dabin) respectively. Among four participants without parents in South Korea, Dodam was based in a group home living with others from unaccompanied-refugee backgrounds, not from the same school. Moa and Nurim lived in accommodation offered by the school, not in a group home, and Parang lived with his friend at a private flat.

Only two participants (Chanseul and Mira) were living with their parents. Mira had stayed in student accommodation during her school days but has lived with her parents since she graduated from alternative school. In the case of other students with parents residing in South Korea (Bada, Dabin, Gaon, Jinsol and Suri), parents work in a local city, not in Seoul (the capital city of South Korea), and left their children in Seoul for education. This may be linked to the fact that most alternative schools for young North Korean refugees are clustered in the Seoul region (see chapter 2). It also seems difficult for refugees from North Korea to settle in a family unit in Seoul due to high living costs and difficulty in finding work. While they accepted the inevitable situation that they live away from their parents, some were unhappy with it, saying, for example, *‘it took quite a long time until I met my mother again in South Korea, but we are still living separately’* (Suri). This must be a stressful situation for most young refugees as they again experience separation from family that they previously experienced before entering South Korea. In fact, it seems common that young North Korean refugees experience family break-up when they move from the North to the South (Kim, 2013). In considering that family is one of the important resources of social support (Park and Yoon, 2007), separation from family is a significant factor that cause young refugees to feel a deficiency in the process of settlement in South Korea.

Meanwhile, Chanseul and Haegil experienced difficulty in living at student accommodation due to Chanseul’s negative feeling of ‘group living’ and Haegil’s trouble with a housemother. Chanseul currently lives with both his parents and Haegil lives with her mother. They commute a distance of four hours to and from school every day as their houses are located in Incheon, an outlying city. The accommodation situation of participants is summarised in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 Accommodation situation of participants

No.	ID	Age	Gender	Type	Housemates	Parents residing in South Korea
1	Bada	22	Male	Student accommodation	Other students from the same school	Y(parents)
2	Chanseul	22	Male	House	Parents and one younger brother	Y(parents)
3	Dabin	27	Female	Student accommodation → House	One friend	Y(mother)
4	Dodam	19	Female	Group home	Other unaccompanied refugees from different schools	N
5	Gaon	18	Female	Student accommodation	Other students from the same school	Y(mother)
6	Haegil	17	Female	Student accommodation → House	Mother and one older sister	Y(mother)
7	Jinsol	17	Female	Student accommodation	Other students from the same school	Y(Parents)
8	Moa	17	Female	Student accommodation	Other students from the same school	N
9	Mira	21	Female	Student accommodation → House	Parents and one younger brother	Y(parents)
10	Nurim	24	Male	Student accommodation	Other students from the same school	N
11	Parang	22	Male	House	One friend	N
12	Suri	21	Female	Students accommodation	Other students from the same school	Y(mother)

By providing accommodation, alternative schools accommodate and support students beyond offering educational support. The findings suggest that alternative schools act *in loco parentis* for their refugee students. For example, Dodam, in particular, expressed a strong sense of satisfaction with her accommodation situation; commenting on friendly housemates and a family atmosphere, as well as the physical facilities. In a photo-task session, she described her first day of arriving at the group home and the warm feeling at home, with her photo.

Picture 5.2 Excerpt from Photovoice (2)



The title of this photo is 'my home'. ... In fact, I was annoyed that I should live with others at that time because I had always lived in a group before coming here. However, on the first day when I arrived at the group home, the housemother and other friends very warmly welcomed me. They called each other 'sister' and called the housemother 'aunt'. I had difficulty in sleeping but I slept deeply on the first day, feeling like I was at my real home. ... I met a warm family here. 'My home' is like my real home where I am born again in South Korea.

(Dodam, photo-task session)

As seen from the quotation above, for unaccompanied refugees, accommodation may have a social impact which is more valuable than simply having a place to live.

Dodam felt that she had found a new family on whom she was able to rely and a trusted adult who would act as a protector for her like a mother. On the other hand, five female participants were less satisfied with their experience living at student accommodation, noting that there was: a) not enough time and space for a private life (Jinsol and Moa); b) trouble or conflict with a housemother (Gaon and Haegil); c) trouble or conflict with other roommates (Gaon, Haegil, Jinsol, Moa and Suri); d) little opportunity to meet and make South Korean friends (Gaon, Haegil, Jinsol and Suri). Haegil and Jinsol expressed their feeling of envy towards the status of the group home where only two students shared a room and enough space was allocated to each student. All students can stay in student accommodation or at a group home securely as long as they want, but only until graduation from the current school. For this reason, two young women without parents in South Korea (Dodam and Moa) were worried about accommodation after their graduation in the near future. The findings support Ager and Strang (2008) who argue that we need to consider physical conditions and securing tenancy as well as social relationships.

The findings also suggest that there may be specific issues to consider about group living for North Korean refugees. Chanseul mentioned his negative feelings of ‘group living’ itself at the initial stage of his schooling and this was also found in the quotation previously offered by Dodam with her photo. This point seems to be important in considering young people’s transition experiences during the migration journey from North Korea to South Korea. They will have experienced moving from and to several hidden places and staying in a camp for displaced people with others throughout their transit journeys. Even after entering South Korea, they also stayed in a restricted place with others at least for six months for a background investigation and an initial settlement education (see chapter 2). Therefore, they may have a negative feeling about ‘*living with others as a group*’ as Chanseul mentioned. It is, therefore, necessary to consider not only security and safety issues in this context but also the impact of any difficult past experiences.

Notably, all of the nine participants who were living, or used to live, in student accommodation mentioned difficulty in making a social connection with South Koreans. They viewed it somewhat negatively that they studied at the same school and lived at the same houses with only young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds, as this meant it was hard to meet and mingle with South Koreans in natural settings. It is necessary to discuss later how accommodation support offered by the schools plays an appropriate role as a site of social network formation.

Well-being

Health-related issues were not explicitly included in the research questions of the study. However, it was found that much of the data touched on the young refugees’ physical and psychological well-being, as they talked about their experiences of alternative schools. ‘Well-being’ is defined in several different ways in Korea but the current study used the term to explain both physical and psychological well-being. Four of the 12 participants (Bada, Jinsol, Mira and Suri) did not make any comments about their own health condition. Bada and Jinsol counted themselves as ‘*very lucky*’ that they arrived with their whole family in South Korea relatively easily, in

comparison to other North Korean refugees. This group of four participants comprises three refugee students with both their parents and one with a mother.

Seven other students (two males and five females) mentioned their concerns about physical or mental health due to the tough experience of migration. For instance, Parang had suffered from tuberculosis from when he was in North Korea but he was cured completely in South Korea. During his migration, he was captured by Chinese police and sent back to North Korea. He was then forced into a labour camp and contracted tuberculosis there. Dabin also contracted the same disease while being held in a labour camp in North Korea. This reflects the fact that tuberculosis is still a fatal illness in North Korea (Do et al., 2016). In addition to serious physical health difficulties such as tuberculosis, the experience of the arduous journey left them with emotional and mental health difficulties, and they talked about how they were still suffering, for example, from feeling depressed (Chanseul), angry (Gaon and Haegil), having nightmares (Dabin), or suffering from insomnia (Haegil). Regarding health treatment, the participants noted that the initial medical check-up and follow-up treatment at Hanawon was very helpful in recovering their health. Students also reported that they could receive medical care and dentistry for free or at a low price at specific hospitals which established sister relations with the schools, or by a voluntary doctor's visit. All three schools in the study provided a counselling programme in order to help refugee students overcome their trauma. Professional counsellors visit the schools and meet students' emotional or mental needs on a regular basis. Taking a typical example, Gaon received individual counselling for around one year at school and viewed it helpful for her. She said:

The regular meeting with the counsellor was very helpful for me. I actually thought at first, 'how could it be helpful for me?' 'No one can understand me'. ... I met the counsellor once a week from last year until the first semester this year, except for school vacation. ... The counsellor said that I had improved since the previous year when she had met me for the first time.

(Gaon, interview)

She also gave details of a serious trauma caused by her father. When she was in North Korea, she suffered physical abuse by her father. Unfortunately, she also experienced assault at the hands of her stepfather and witnessed him assaulting her

mother too. Due to the traumatic experience, she was often upset and frustrated, and she was also provoked beyond her endurance even when watching a movie in which a man beat a woman. However, she said, *‘I am now getting free from the severe stress and anger with the counsellor’s help’*. It is worth noting that the counsellor had also been a female adult refugee from North Korea. She said, *‘I was able to open my mind easily whenever I met her. She seemed to understand me and my words exactly.’*

Dabin had also had a traumatic experience in North Korea and in China. She was captured by Chinese police when she hid in a small rural village in China after crossing the border. Even though she was only nine years old at that time, she was sent back to North Korea and held in a labour camp with her father. She was beaten, hanging upside down, and forced to take part in physical labour. Her father died under torture in the prison. Fortunately, she was released from the prison with the help of her brother and re-escaped from North Korea. In this process, she had separated from her mother and brother. She stayed in China for around ten years in order to find her brother but failed. She reunited with her mother in South Korea and found out that her brother had already died in North Korea. She said, *‘I always had a sort of anger and resentment in my mind and I thought that I would avenge my father and brother’s death on them someday.’* She participated in a group counselling programme at school and shared her experiences with other young refugees. By participating in the programme, she said that she recovered from her past thoughts that *‘I must be the unluckiest and unhappiest person in the world’* and realised that *‘I am a lucky person and need to be happy’*.

Haegil had been deeply hurt by a tragic experience in China. She crossed the river to China with her older sister when she was 13 years old. As soon as she crossed the river, she and her sister were trafficked by someone and she was sold to a Chinese man, who was aged around 30, and forced to marry him. One day, she was able to escape from him with a neighbour’s help and met her sister again. I cannot describe the details of her experience in my thesis at her request in the interview. She was recommended by the school to participate in an art therapy programme. However, she said that the art therapy programme was not as helpful as expected because it was

difficult to open her mind to the therapist. She said, *‘My heart did not move when the therapist said something to me. Her expressions sounded like something you would say to anybody, not a special thing only for me’*. It seemed that she may not have felt ready to engage with the therapy programme offered by the school. This study, therefore, suggests that specialised professional interventions and on-going support are needed for some young refugees.

In the present study, some regarded ‘recovering from the past’ as a part of the process of preparation for living in South Korea as an independent citizen, saying, for example, *‘I think I am not ready to go into mainstream as I have not received yet’* (Moa), *‘I hope my wounds are healed before I leave my school. Then, I think I can stand alone and start my life confidently with South Koreans’* (Nurim). Meanwhile, they felt a sense of success when they found themselves recovered from trauma. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

In addition to the medical approaches, the schools also made efforts to improve the health of refugee students by offering a range of extra-curricular programmes, such as outings, regular walking, music lessons, and sports clubs. Taking an example of school 1, Bada, Chanseul and Dodam took photos to show the positive sides of going hiking once a week.

Picture 5.3 Excerpt from Photovoice (3)



This is the point where we finish our regular walking. ... Once I arrive at the end point, my mind is totally changed as I can see this beautiful scenery. ... My current life is like I am climbing a mountain. Although I feel tough and sometimes tired, I can have a bright future ahead of me if I keep going up?

(Chanseul, photo-task session)

For the students, going up the mountain offers them a time for reflection and a sense of achievement. This regular walking may be helpful for students' mental health by developing positive thinking.

In short, young North Korean refugees in the study had their experiences of alternative schools in the four areas: education, future career, accommodation and well-being. They also understood these experiences as a process of preparation for becoming integrated into South Korean society as independent citizens. Notably, the empirical data extracted from the study reveals that school teachers play a key role, significantly affecting those areas of the refugee students' experiences in alternative school settings. This is outlined below under the theme 'teacher influence'.

Teacher influence

According to the findings from 12 participants, as has been presented so far, the four aspects to the holistic support of alternative schools – education, future career planning, accommodation, and physical and psychological well-being – were mainly arranged, organised and practised by school teachers across the three alternative schools. In addition, school teachers are likely to be the only South Korean persons who the young refugees meet regularly and keep a close relationship with. Therefore, across diverse domains of their lives inside and outside school, they tended to rely on their teachers and this kind of dependency may reinforce the teacher's influence on them.

The role of teachers

First of all, teachers' influence, on the basis of their expertise, was notable in young people's accounts in the study. Teachers were recognised as experts who were able to teach, help, guide and instruct refugee students from North Korea and solve their problems. Nine of the 12 participants were of the view that teachers at alternative school were specialised in teaching North Korean refugee students with special academic needs caused by educational deprivation during their migration and the differences in the education systems between the two Koreas. To put it briefly, the

young people indicated that teachers generally delivered lessons slowly, in consideration of the students' academic level and this mode of teaching was helpful for their study. In particular, it was found that teachers in person organised their classes, edited textbooks and made class materials fitted to students from North Korean refugee backgrounds.

In the eyes of the participants, teachers at alternative school were also seen as skilful people in helping and supporting refugee young people with special social needs. It is well known that they are highly likely to have a traumatic experience in North Korea or during their migration and also to experience multi-layered difficulties while settling in and becoming integrated into South Korea as a member of society. Consequently, a range of social needs may arise from this situation. All the participants highlighted that they learnt about South Korean society from their school teachers, receiving relevant knowledge and information needed in adjusting to the new society. For example:

When I first started to live in South Korea, I was so hurt by South Koreans' cold eyes. At that time, I was looking for a part-time job but I was always rejected because of my North Korean accent. ... Some people looked down on me, saying "Have you ever eaten this?" or "You probably never saw this before in North Korea." ... Teachers at this school explained about South Koreans' attitudes and also Korean culture and history. After that, I was able to understand more about this society.

(Dabin, interview)

Dabin also referred to her various negative experiences, such as rejection, ignorance and prejudice from the beginning of her settlement in South Korea. Under this circumstance, she became dependent on her teacher, particularly on the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the society as a South Korean. It could be said that the teacher was viewed as being competent and knowledgeable by the student. Like Dabin above, all the participants, regardless of age, gender and school type, said that they learnt and came to understand South Korean society through school teachers. Dodam, in the early stage of settlement, emphasised the role of teachers whom she met at school as '*only a channel to South Korean society*'. Therefore, it is more

likely that young refugees in the early stage of settlement have a relatively high level of dependence on school teachers in several ways.

Seven participants across the three schools mentioned that they experienced the influence of teachers in the distribution of important information at school. They tended to mostly receive useful information '*through teachers*' (Mira), for example, saying that '*it is not easy for us to find out the information unless teachers offer us*' (Gaon). The information was viewed as important as it was mostly associated with funding schemes or special admission for a university. Although the refugee students also noted that they could obtain all of it relatively easily, compared to those in general school settings, they still thought that the acquisition of information highly depended on teachers.

Teacher-student relationship

Most participants, of course not all, viewed their relations with teachers positively. The close relationships between teachers and students were highlighted, especially in comparison with a teacher-student relationship at general school. For example:

The feeling of general school was that it was just a place for study. It was hard to feel a sense of closeness between my teacher and me because we all were very busy at school and there were many other students whom my teacher had to pay attention to. On the other hand, in the alternative school, there were only a few students in a class and thus we could always talk with our teacher. I liked talking with teachers.

(Mira, interview)

One young man (Bada) and five young women (Gaon, Haegil, Jinsol, Mira and Suri), who had experienced general school earlier, emphasised that the teacher-student relationship was much closer at alternative schools than at general schools. In a similar way, teachers influenced students by developing positive relationships with the students, particularly when they helped the refugee students settle in South Korea and recover from past experiences. The participants expressed the teachers' approaches in some positive words such as '*warm*', '*kind*' and '*friendly*'. For example:

When I went to a coffee shop for the first time, there was nothing that I could understand on the menu. I just ordered a cup of espresso without knowing the meaning of espresso. The coffee was too bitter but I just drank a whole cup. After this happened, I lost courage. ... One day, my class teacher asked me to walk together and she told me various things. We also went to a coffee shop near the school and she explained the coffee menu. ... This was one of my warm memories in the school.

(Suri, interview)

It is likely that young North Korean refugees have negative perceptions of South Korean society due to their embarrassing experiences at the early stage of adjusting to the society. They may be hurt or become less confident easily when they make a mistake or have a misunderstanding. This study revealed that teachers could help refugee students overcome some barriers that they may face in the adaptation process. This view was also found in another female student's photo and excerpt, as can be seen below.

Picture 5.4 Excerpt from Photovoice (4)



The light in the dark reminded me of my teacher whom I met at this school. When I felt like I was walking in the dark with a fear of new life and my hazy future, my teacher was like the light that illuminated the dark street.

(Moa, photo-task session)

She described her teacher as a person who guided her in the dark with her picture of a streetlight. As a newcomer, she had '*a feeling of fear and anxiety*' about her new life and '*unknowable future*'. At that moment, the teacher was a significant person who led her to come out from the challenging situation, expressed as darkness, and find a light again in her life. Similarly, Mira illustrated her teacher as '*a person who*

opened a new avenue'. In short, these findings provide three points: a) students' understanding and knowledge of a new society is improved by teachers; b) teachers mainly use a student-friendly approach, by building a positive relationship with the students; and c) students view the teachers' approaches positively.

This student-friendly approach was also highlighted when teachers managed so-called disruptive or trouble-making students. For example, teachers '*understand them deeply*' and '*take care of those annoying students and help them calm down in class*' (Dabin), and teachers '*make efforts for them to be tolerated*' by other students and to '*encourage*' them to keep studying at school without dropping out (Suri). It was seen that teachers made every effort to have an influence on students by using student-friendly attempts rather than punishment or authority assigned by the school. Nurim noted that the strong relationship between teachers and students also made a significant contribution to helping North Korean refugee students complete their studies, avoiding school dropout.

In fact, there is no way of compelling students to come to school in alternative schools. Students can leave school anytime they want. There are no school regulations that students should obey mandatorily and the certification of graduation from this school is not actually meaningful and useful to me. However, my teacher held me when I wanted to give up school. Thanks to my teacher, I am still in this school.

(Nurim, interview)

Alternative schools are unlikely to have strict regulations to control students, due to the somewhat informal structure of school. This study found that the young people's schooling tended to be maintained, in the main, by teachers' efforts, or through personal relationships with teachers, rather than by school regulations. In particular, in the two non-accredited schools where students cannot receive official certification of graduation, it looked difficult to control students with a formal school system. In Nurim's comment above, teachers affected students more strongly than the formal rules or regulations in his school. Another five participants (Dabin, Moa, Mira, Parang and Suri) also remarked that they were able to keep studying through the help of teachers. Interestingly, all four students from two non-accredited schools (Mira, Nurim, Parang and Suri) were included in this group. Therefore, it is worth

discussing later the relations between types of school and teacher-student relationships.

In addition, teachers' strong influence on refugee students from North Korea may be linked to the students' vulnerable situation associated with their parents. As seen in Table 5.1, this study had four students with both parents and four students with a mother in South Korea, and the remaining four were unaccompanied refugees without parents. Although eight of the 12 participants have both their parents or mother in South Korea, only two students (Chanseul and Mira) were living with his/her parents at that time of the study and another six students were living separately, as their parents worked in a remote city to earn money, as noted earlier. Therefore, it seems difficult for ten of the 12 participants to receive proper support for their schooling from parents. In practice, all the participants, regardless of living with parents, said that parents are not or cannot be involved in their schooling. This is one of the characteristics of North Korean refugee students enrolled in alternative schools. For this reason, in alternative school settings, teachers tend to take the role in the place of parents and have a strong influence on their refugee students' schooling. One described this situation clearly as below.

Most students here in this school do not live with parents or they are helpless with parents who cannot look after them at all. Of course, it would be hard for the parents to care about their children's school life. Under this circumstance, it is no wonder that students' schooling is strongly influenced by teachers.

(Parang, interview)

On the other hand, this study included two participants (Chanseul and Dodam) who had been at the school for around six months at the time of the study. They both understood the role and influence of the teacher chiefly on the basis of 'a structural relationship' (Raven, 1999, p.166), rather than an interpersonal relationship. While both of them admitted the teachers' kind and warm attitudes and friendly attempts towards students, their views still focused on the assigned role and position of the teacher. For example:

I mostly talk with my teacher about study. I think I can always ask something about my study to her, because school is a place where students study and so teachers basically have a kind of obligation that they listen to students' need for study. I think we have a right to ask something about study. ... Alternative school is a school and therefore I can talk about my study anytime without any burden. I try not to ask about anything except for study.

(Chanseul, interview)

The young man above has a limited view of teachers at school in relation to something happening in a classroom, particularly focusing on study. It seems that he had a kind of expectation that teachers should be responsible for the academic work of a student as an assigned role of teachers. Meanwhile, Haegil and Jinsol talked about their experiences of the authoritarian attitude of teachers. While they understood that the authority of teacher was given by the school and students should obey teachers, they expressed a feeling of disobedience when teachers spoke to them in a commanding tone. Nevertheless, both of them thought that the teachers were right at that moment. The experiences of teachers' authoritarian approaches were mainly associated with male teachers at school.

As noted above, the young people also held the view that the student-teacher relations were affected by the mechanism of information distribution '*through teachers*'. For example:

When we apply for a scholarship or a university, it is necessary to get a recommendation from my teacher. If a teacher recommends someone, he/she can have many good opportunities easily, for example, to participate in a useful programme or to meet a famous person. To do this, therefore, we need to, essentially, maintain a good relationship with teachers at school.

(Bada, interview)

As can be seen from the above quotation, refugee students at alternative school may feel the necessity of maintaining a good relationship with, or gaining the trust of teachers so that they obtain useful information or benefit from the relationship relatively easily. Dabin, Haegil and Jinsol, from a state-accredited school, indicated that this circumstance was likely to make the student-teacher relations superficial or made it hard for them to freely reveal everything on their mind to teachers. For

instance, Dabin tended not to speak her '*real mind*' frankly to her teacher, saying, '*the teachers' judgements of me would be important when I apply for a scholarship or a university. What I say may give them negative impressions of me*'. Seven of the eight participants from a state-accredited school said that they tended not to speak about what are in the deepest depths of their mind, although they admitted the teachers' efforts to be helpful, kind and to treat them like friends and appreciated the favours and help from their teachers. In addition, Bada emphasised that students may feel discrimination or unfairness when teachers make a decision about to whom the benefit is offered, or students may miss a crucial opportunity when they fail to be recommended by school teachers:

For prospective graduates, there is a special and big funding scheme where we can get a scholarship for university. To apply for this, we need to get a recommendation letter from school teachers. One of my friends always studied hard and obeyed teachers to get this funding. He eventually failed to get recommended by his teacher. He lost favour in his teacher's eyes as he got in trouble at the last moment right before his graduation. ... Teachers probably like good students and so some of them behave like a good student only in front of their teachers inside school. Teachers do not know their real faces out of school. This kind of situation sometimes feels unfair to me. ... It is not too much to say that it depends on teachers' decisions whether we can get funding or not. If I got in some trouble, the chances of me succeeding would be reduced. I know teachers are always making an effort for us, but there is still discrimination in favour of the good students. Of course, teachers say that we have no discrimination and treat you all equally, but I do not think so.

(Bada, interview)

This somewhat negative view of the student-teacher relations, as seen above, was mostly found among participants from a state-accredited school with more students, rather than those from the other two non-accredited schools with fewer students.

Teachers' religion

Although it was not a main aim to explore teachers' religion in the current study, it would be worth discussing it, as some young people's experiences of alternative schools were closely related to the teachers' religion. It is widely known that alternative schools for young North Korean refugees are mostly based on Christianity

and are supported by local churches. Five students (Dabin, Haegil, Moa, Parang and Suri) were of the view that teachers' commitment and kind approaches to educating refugee students from North Korea were closely linked to the teachers' religion. For example:

I felt something special in the teachers' minds and so I always felt quite happy, and I was taught and impacted on whenever I talked with them at school. It did not seem that they just taught us as a teacher. Rather, I was able to feel something more from them. As it turns out, they were Christians.

(Parang, interview)

In the quotation above, although the teacher did not say explicitly that he/she was a Christian, the student recognised '*something special*' in the teacher's approach, particularly derived from Christianity. It could be said that this was not limited to just one group of teachers associated with Parang's experience above, but are general characteristics that we may find in most alternative schools for young North Korean refugees. This may be linked to the fact that South Korean alternative schools are mostly established on a foundation of a religion, especially Christianity, and those schools also prefer Christian teachers when they employ teachers (Park, 2012). At the same time, it was found that the religion more explicitly influenced students when teachers instructed their students or managed some concerns of students. For example:

Most teachers in this school are Christians and so teachers sometime tell us about the Bible. Naturally I often heard and asked about God and I came to have a faith in God at one moment. I think this was the turning point of my life and at the same time, the most meaningful fruit that I gained during my schooling.

(Mira, interview)

Mira, above, talked about her meeting the teachers at school as a turning point in her life. All participants of the study recognised that their teachers had a religious background in Christianity, although not all were influenced by the teacher's religion directly. There was another female student who illustrated her experience of receiving practical help from her teacher. When she suffered from a nightmare, the

teacher offered help on the basis of religion. In a photo-task session, she brought a picture of a wooden cross which was given to her by the teacher and commented:

Picture 5.5 Excerpt from Photovoice (5)



I sometimes have a nightmare. Each time, I feel so scared. One day, I told this to a teacher at school. The teacher taught me to pray in the name of Jesus and gave me this wooden cross. After that, I always sleep at night with this cross and then I can sleep comfortably without scary dreams. Thanks to the teacher, I started to go to church and believe in Jesus. I now pray whenever I am worried.

(Dabin, photo task session)

As noted, both Dabin and Mira were influenced more directly than others by the religion of teachers. They also came to practice religion as result of the teachers' influence while they were enrolled at alternative school, and, moreover, they identified that those religious experiences brought a significant change into their lives.

It was clearly seen in the study that religion played a meaningful role that enabled teachers to devote themselves to North Korean refugee students without expecting anything in return and, at the same time, had a positive influence on students. On the other hand, the management system of alternative school largely relying on teachers' religious backgrounds and commitments may lead to neglecting the structural problems, resulting in weakening the influence of the teacher. Further discussion on this issue is therefore needed later.

Contexts that lead teachers to be less influential

This study has some participants who were of the view that a teacher's influence became weaker in the context of teacher's work associated with managing sponsors, volunteers and fund raising. For example, Haegil had a problem with a housemother at her accommodation. She made a report to her teacher about the situation, but the teacher said *'you might as well accept and put up with her a little more if you can'*. She also said that there was a sense that *'it is no use telling such a thing to teachers'* among students. This kind of passive approach to solving a problem was referred to by the four participants, mostly when the problem was to do with the relationship between a teacher and a person who supports the school. This situation may be understood in the light of the current management system of alternative schools in South Korea, chiefly operated by financial assistance from local NGOs, individual sponsors or local religious institutions, rather than government subsidies (see chapter 7). Chanseul recognised that it seemed difficult for school teachers to *'ask something more of sponsors who are in a higher place'*.

There was another context where teachers seem to have less influence. This is associated with the poor working conditions and treatment of teachers at alternative schools. Five participants across three schools of the study mentioned low wages and unstable status, with teachers not regarded as civil servants, particularly compared to teachers at general schools. In particular, Moa mentioned the poor financial condition, saying, *'I heard my teacher's salary is less than 10,000,000 KRW (about 6,800 GBP) for a year'*. She continued:

I sometimes feel guilty when I would like to ask some help from the teachers. I try to search something by myself and take care of my own problems. Mostly, I hesitate to discuss my issues with my teacher because I understand how tough their life is.

(Moa, interview)

I did not confirm from her teacher whether Moa's comment about the teacher's salary was correct or not. Nevertheless, it at least seems clear that alternative school teachers were working under poor conditions. This study also identified that the exhaustion of teachers may affect the quality of a teacher-student relationship when

it was recognised by students. Including Moa above, all the five participants said that they tended to be reluctant or hesitant to talk to teachers about private concerns or something rooted in their minds because teachers look very ‘tired’, ‘busy’ or ‘exhausted’. Jinsol said, ‘*I do not want to add something to my teacher’s work*’. Therefore, for better practice in education for North Korean refugee students at alternative schools, it is necessary to carry out further research and policy making about the workload and working environment of teachers.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that there were six participants who made positive comments about teachers’ ‘*sacrifice*’, in spite of the poor working conditions. They described their teacher as a person who ‘*has a strong sense of responsibility*’ (Jinsol), ‘*seeks for social value rather than money*’ (Moa), ‘*devotes themselves to meaningful work*’ (Parang). It is interesting that all the participants had been more than one year at least since starting alternative school. In particular, three of these had been more than two years at school. On the other hand, Chanseul and Dodam earlier, who had a relatively neutral view of the relationship with their teachers, had only been involved in the school for around six months. This may indicate that the young people’s views of teachers were influenced by the length of time they spent with teachers at school. Overall, although students in the study indicated that teachers may be less influential in some contexts, they tended to feel sorry and, at the same time, feel grateful for the teachers’ hard work and commitment, rather than underestimating them.

Summary

This chapter has explored the findings of the first research question about young North Korean refugees’ experiences and views of alternative schools. Overall, the experiences that 12 young people had in alternative school settings fell into four main areas: education, future career, accommodation and well-being. These are in line with four domains referred to as means and markers for refugee integration by Ager and Strang (2004; 2008). These are also mentioned as functional aspects of integration by Atfield et al. (2007). The young people also understood these

experiences of alternative schools as a process of preparation for becoming integrated into a new society as independent citizens in South Korea.

Education was revealed as an area that refugee students considered most important, as seen from the reasons why the young people chose alternative school rather than general school. While the participants were generally satisfied with the helpful approaches that alternative schools offered for refugee students' academic achievement, education programmes for enhancing their social understanding were viewed somewhat negatively as being less effective.

Alongside educational support, alternative schools offered other kinds of support, such as help with accommodation, future career planning, and physical and psychological well-being. The schools also helped refugee students to plan and prepare for their future careers. Although most of the programmes of work experience were run as a one-off event, participants received useful information about various fields of work or were inspired and motivated to work in a specific field. The schools also provided accommodation support for students from North Korean refugee backgrounds. The young people's views of accommodation varied depending on the type of accommodation they lived in, their relationship with housemates, and their personal preference for living in a group. In the current study, the young people not only received medical treatment but also took part in school activities offered by the schools for the purpose of improving North Korean refugee students' physical and psychological well-being. While some were influenced positively by the programmes and had an experience of recovering from their trauma or diseases, others were still a certain distance away from being involved in the healing programmes.

This study also found a difference in language issue between young refugees from North Korea and those from other countries, although exploring this topic was not an aim of the study at its outset. For other groups of refugees, speaking the main language of the arriving country is identified as central to the integration process. However, for young North Korean refugees residing in South Korea, learning English was identified as one of the significant tasks that they should achieve for

their successful integration, although English is a second language in South Korea, not a mother tongue of the host country. The findings from the accounts of refugee students' experiences of their schools clearly revealed that alternative schools play a significant role in the integration into South Korean society of young North Korean refugees. This is because the four areas – education, future career, accommodation, and well-being (referred to as education, employment, housing and health in Ager and Strang, 2008) – that refugee students in the study experienced in alternative school settings, are known as 'key aspects' of integration into a new society (Ager and Strang, 2008, p.173).

In the present study, the 'teacher' is found to be one of the significant factors influencing the students' views of experiences in alternative school settings. The young people tended to rely on school teachers because they experienced being put into vulnerable situations in several ways as newcomers to South Korean society. Taking into consideration that the influence of the teacher is likely to be reinforced by the students' dependency on teachers, I would suggest that teachers at alternative schools have a certain degree of power over their refugee students. However, the teachers' influence was weaker in certain contexts, mainly regarding matters associated with sponsors or volunteers who support the schools, or the relatively poor working conditions of alternative school teachers.

The findings in this chapter help to shed light on the holistic work of South Korean alternative schools set up for young North Korean refugees, which is a topic under-researched until now. Following this outline of the young refugees' school experiences which have been identified in this chapter, their challenges and successes in alternative school settings are explored in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Findings: Challenges and successes in alternative school settings

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the experiences of young North Korean refugees in alternative school settings and how they viewed those experiences. The young people's overall school experiences identified in the data were categorised into four areas of life: education, future career, accommodation and well-being. These categories were derived from my analysis of the data and were also guided by my review of the literature. The young refugees in the study also viewed the experiences of the four areas as a process of preparation for becoming integrated into a new society, South Korea, as independent citizens.

This chapter focuses on the findings of the second and third research questions: how the young refugees understand and experience challenges and successes in alternative school settings. I did not provide participants with any definitions of challenge and success at the start of the study. Rather, I sought to explore how the young people viewed challenges and successes while carrying out a free-associating session about the research topics, photo-task sessions, and one-to-one interviews. This chapter first details the young people's challenges and then discusses successes.

Experiences of challenges

Although I guided 12 young North Korean refugees to the topic of challenges in alternative school settings, most participants talked freely about a wide range of challenges, not limited to those within the schools. The young people's challenges were interwoven with each other, ranging widely from the past to the future and from within school to outside school. This may be because their daily lives were intertwined closely with school, as described in the previous chapter. The extended conversations helped me not only to explore the young people's difficulties but also to identify how their past challenging experiences were linked to their present and future lives, as outlined below.

Labelling as ‘a refugee student’ at ‘a refugee school’³

Seven of 12 participants (Bada, Chanseul, Dabin, Dodam, Gaon, Jinsol and Moa) indicated it was a challenge that their schools were labelled as ‘a special school for young North Korean refugees’ and hence their identity as a North Korean refugee was naturally uncovered when they revealed their status as a student at the alternative schools. For example, one student said:

We feel challenged at alternative school when we are introduced in a way that distinguishes us as refugees when we attend some events. It would be enough to just refer to the school name but people add a special explanation to the school name, for instance, not ‘a school’ but ‘a school for young North Korean refugees’. We feel shamed and frustrated whenever we face this sort of situation.

(Bada, group discussion)

The other six young people also felt ‘*being classified as a specific group of young people from North Korea*’ and ‘*being separated and discriminated against*’

(Chanseul). All seven participants above were from a state-accredited school in the study. One of the seven had a feeling of being labelled online as well. She said:

Gaon: I use Facebook and have around 2,000 friends there. One day, I updated my school name on the profile page. It means all my Facebook friends came to know I was from North Korea. Revealing my school name was the same as revealing that I am from North Korea. I felt somewhat ashamed and regretted revealing my school name on Facebook.

Researcher: Can you tell me why you felt ashamed? Did something happen to you after revealing the school name?

Gaon: Some asked me silly questions such as ‘Whose side are you on when North Koreans fight South Koreans?’ or some tagged me with news articles about North Korea. Of course I did not think that they meant to hurt me, but I just felt ashamed and felt like hiding in a small hole.

(Gaon, interview)

³ While the English term ‘refugee’ was used throughout this thesis, the Korean term ‘*nan-min*’ equivalent to ‘refugee’, was not used during the data collection in order to avoid contributing to the distress of participants, due to the use of the term ‘refugee’. However, it is necessary to use the English term with the intention to illustrate the young people’s status (see chapter 2).

Unlike Gaon above, Dodam made her school name public and shared her school life with Facebook friends, posting relevant photos and stories. Although she also had a negative view of '*being labelled*', she was not reluctant to reveal her school name on Facebook. The difference between Gaon and Dodam may be linked to their respective lengths of residence in South Korea. At the time the study was being conducted, Dodam was at the initial stage of adjustment to South Korea and her SNS friends were almost all young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds, except for only a few South Koreans whom she met at church, while Gaon had already been in South Korea for a long time. It had been around four years since she enrolled in the school. She strongly desired to mingle with South Koreans and tried to make South Korean friends on Facebook. Although it would be difficult to generalise her online experience, her comments led me to reflect on young refugees' online experiences.

All 12 participants had their own smartphones and seemed to access online resources easily, including internet messengers. Most of them also used social media outlets, such as Facebook or blogs. I did not set out questions about the young refugees' online activities in the current study, but they often said what they did on the Internet and some even invited me to connect with them on their social media. While most of the young people in the study appeared to be familiar with online activities, such as using SNS, to my knowledge, little attention has been paid to the online experiences in existing studies on young North Korean refugees' schooling. I would therefore suggest expanding our research interests to online areas beyond offline areas, when exploring young refugees' experiences in future research, in order to improve our understandings of young refugees currently living in the digital age.

There was another group of five young people who felt challenged about South Koreans' seeing them '*curiously*' (Dabin) '*with pity*' (Suri), and '*differently*' (Bada), when they disclosed their identity as a refugee from North Korea. These kinds of experiences were likely to make them feel down, for example, saying '*I usually forget that I am a North Korean refugee, but I become hurt and less confident once this sort of thing happened to me*' (Jinsol). Others also felt '*discouraged*' (Haegil), and '*a lowering of their self-esteem*' (Dabin).

The concerns over revealing identity were not limited to the young people's current lives. Dabin, Nurim and Parang were concerned about whether they should reveal their identity or not to South Korean students after going to university. This was because they had heard of negative experiences about doing so from senior graduates, who had already been university students. Similarly, a graduate-participant (Mira) had an embarrassing experience at the start of her university life, as described below.

On an induction day at my university, when I was asked to introduce myself, I just said 'I am from North Korea' by chance while talking about the high school I had graduated from. After that, I felt that they read my face when they talked about North Korea or the leader, Kim Jong-un. ... They often said 'our country' and 'your country'. I felt that they did not let me into 'our country'. I know that they did not have any intention of excluding me and they are still kind and warm to me, but there seems to be a kind of barrier between me and them.

(Mira, interview)

In the quotation, it seems apparent that invisible barriers still remained between her, as a refugee from North Korea, and other South Korean peers, even if there was not any explicit discrimination or intended exclusion by South Korean students. She continued to say, '*I do not mind that others come to know I was from North Korea, but I think I do not need to tell it in person before they know it naturally.*' In the present study, the refugee students' concerns about revealing their identity give some insight into the latest statistics. A countrywide survey of 1,266 young North Korean refugees (aged 8-18), conducted by the Korea Hana Foundation in 2016, found that the proportion of the young refugees who did not disclose the fact that they were from North Korea was 61.1% of 857 respondents. One of the reasons mentioned, '*I do not feel the necessity of revealing my identity*', ranked highest, at 46.3% (Jang et al., 2017). Going one step forward from the survey, it would be necessary to explore in future research why they do not feel the necessity of revealing their identity as a North Korean refugee and what kinds of advantages and disadvantages they experience when revealing their identity.

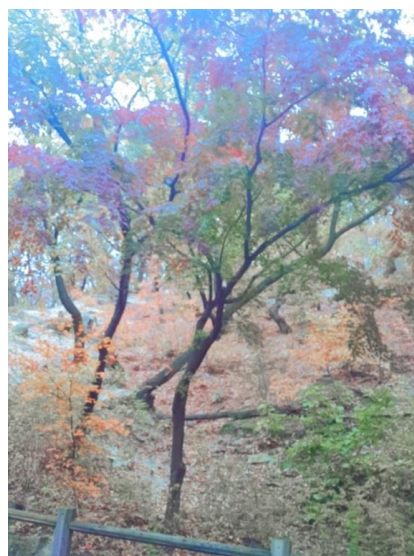
In light of the findings above, young North Korean refugees in this study seemed to have an understanding that they were likely to face a challenge in feeling they belonged to the mainstream if they revealed their identity as a North Korean refugee.

Similarly, the relationship between identity and belonging has been discovered to be an important issue in the field of refugee studies (Baak, 2011; Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Fincham, 2012). Another point for further discussion is an aspect of social exclusion that some young people in the study experienced. In the quotations from two female participants (Gaon and Mira), they did not report any intentional or explicit exclusion from South Korean peers. Nevertheless, it is clear that they had difficulty in being included naturally. It is important to consider that there may be ‘unintentional’ exclusion from the mainstream host society, therefore there is a need to make ‘intentional’ efforts to include young people from refugee backgrounds into mainstream society. Nearly all participants in the current study did not report any kind of efforts to aid in integration by South Koreans. Rather, they emphasised the effort they made, saying ‘*I need to change*’, ‘*I need to adjust*’, and ‘*I should become integrated*’ to the mainstream. The accounts by the young people may lead us to consider what intentional efforts people in the mainstream society could and should make, one of which is to treat them as an ordinary citizen, not a special person. This is discussed further in the following section.

Desire to be ‘ordinary’

Most, but not all, of the participants had a desire to be seen as ‘ordinary’. This was clearly presented by a photo from Haegil.

Picture 6.1 Excerpt from Photovoice (6)



These are always leaves
regardless of where they are,
on the tree or on the road.
I, we, are just ‘youth’. Why
do people refer to us
specially as ‘refugee youth’?
Please call us just ‘youth’,
not ‘refugee youth’.

(Haegil, photo-task session)

This longing to be ordinary may be linked to the underlying reason they did not want to reveal their identity. Parang said, *‘Of course I am grateful for them helping us, but what I really want is to be treated as a normal person like other ordinary South Koreans’*. The young people wanted to be viewed as members of society, rather than as people who were different.

The desire for ordinariness can be understood by taking into account the special context of North Korean refugees. The two Koreas were originally one country with the same ethnicity (called *han-min-jok*), language and cultural background. Due to the long period of severance after the Korean War (1950-53), however, people from the two Koreas came to have different national identities, although they still shared the same ethnic backgrounds. Understandably, young refugees from North Korea may be confused between having the same ethnic identity but a different national identity. Chanseul felt confused between the two different identities, saying *‘I became upset when I heard people spoke negatively about North Korea or the North Korean leader. Then, I felt like I was not entirely South Korean but still North Korean.’*

This feeling of confusion of identity was mirrored in Bada’s accounts. He used to live in Canada for around a year in order to apply for a refugee visa. Looking back on his past days in Canada, he remarked:

When I lived in Canada, people asked me ‘where are you from?’ when they met me for the first time. I then answered ‘I am from North Korea’. Then they just said ‘welcome’. It was done. There were no additional questions about me. They did not see me with special eyes. I was just one of many foreigners living in Canada. ... Here in South Korea, even though I speak Korean and have the same face colour, they see me differently.

(Bada, group discussion)

In a similar way, Nurim also asked me, *‘Why should we come to South Korea as a refugee? Why should we live here as a refugee?’* Of course, he did not ask me to answer the question. Such a question, however, led me to reflect on a sense of gap and confusion between different national identities, combined with the same ethnic identities, that young refugees from the North may feel in the South.

The desire to be seen as a normal young person was also found in the accounts about wearing a school uniform. Some younger students of school age (Gaon, Haegil, Jinsol and Moa) felt challenged, in that they were not seen as a proper student like other students enrolled in general school.

This school does not look like ‘a school’ as we do not wear a school uniform. Sometimes I feel confused about myself – am I now going to school or going to work? On the way to school from my accommodation, there is a general high school. The other day, when I walked down with my roommates, some South Korean students looked strangely at us wearing casual clothes and makeup.

(Moa, aged 17, group discussion)

Because of not wearing a school uniform, the young people had difficulty having an identity as a student compared to others enrolled in general school. Moreover, they felt stressed when South Koreans looked at them strangely (Haegil, Jinsol and Moa) or they were not regarded as students, as noted by Gaon.

We do not wear a school uniform even though we are students. Sometimes the ticket selling staff at a station asks me, “Are you a student? Right?” Whenever I experience something like this, I feel very embarrassed and even depressed.

(Gaon, aged 18, interview)

Ironically, Gaon had an ambivalent view of wearing a school uniform. While she had a desire to be seen as a general student by wearing a school uniform, she did not want to reveal the fact that she was enrolled at alternative school, saying ‘*Once we wear a school uniform with the logo and name of this school, everyone can know where we are from, even though we never say that we came from North Korea*’. In other words, while she wanted to be seen as a normal student by wearing a school uniform, she did not want to reveal herself as a student at a separate school for young North Korean refugees. All the four who indicated the necessity of wearing a school uniform were female and teenage students (aged 17-18). This is the same age as South Korean high school students. However, older students over school age did not mention wearing a school uniform.

Currently, to my knowledge, there are no alternative schools for young North Korean refugees where students wear a school uniform in South Korea. In fact, it would be impossible for all students to wear a school uniform in alternative school settings, taking into consideration that a majority of students are older students and over school age. Nevertheless, it was a challenge to younger students in the study not to wear a school uniform. They had a feeling of separation from mainstream school students, due to the difference of appearance. It would be worth considering that a school uniform may reinforce a young refugee's identity as a student and as a normal young person, especially for teenage students of school-going age.

Bias and media impact

It is important to explore why the young people in this study felt '*ashamed*' (Gaon) '*low self-esteem*' (Dabin), and '*less confident*' (Jinsol) when they were called '*a refugee student*' at '*a refugee school*'. The findings from the data show that the young people might feel bias toward North Koreans in expressions that South Koreans used. Some said, for example, '*South Koreans seem to think that people from North Korea may be somewhat inferior to them*' (Nurim), '*It looks like there are a lot of negative views of North Korea and North Koreans*' (Bada), '*There is a kind of stereotype among South Koreans that North Koreans are poor people from a poor country*' (Gaon), and '*I felt frustrated when people ask me "Do you know this?", pointing out very easy words*' (Moa). This seems to be due to the same but different language elements, such as using foreign words, between the two Koreas, as noted earlier.

In particular, eight of the 12 refugee students complained that the media tended to provoke people to have a distorted view of North Korean refugees by relaying mainly negative perceptions. This issue tends to be magnified with an increase in North Korean refugees' exposure to diverse media sources in South Korea. For example, three of the eight told me in interviews:

TV reports about North Korean refugees are too exaggerated in my eyes. They described us as very poor people always eating plants. (Gaon)

We can understand what people say and live like normal South Korean people. But, we were shown as a problematic group with serious deficiencies on TV. (Jinsol)

We used to play, study, and meet friends like other South Koreans here when we were younger in North Korea even though we were not that rich. However, most TV programmes show the dark sides of poverty and hunger rather than our ordinary life. (Bada)

In addition to the media effect, Haegil also pointed out that the school tended to highlight the vulnerable sides of refugee students. She understood that this might be in order to gain more sponsorship from South Koreans. Although this is a student's view towards her school, it may be that she reflected a view about North Korean refugees which seems to be prevalent among South Koreans. That is, South Koreans mostly tend to see North Koreans as a group of recipients of help from South Korean society. This kind of view towards North Korean refugees may hinder the two Koreas from becoming integrated mutually in a society, and being equal in status.

Dabin, an older participant, offered an additional explanation that there might be a difference in students' experiences depending on the date of their birth and the period when they were escaping from North Korea. In her school, while she underwent the hard period when the food supply was stopped in North Korea, other younger students, who were born after the late 1990's, did not understand that kind of tough period when there had been serious food shortages. She said, *'While I crossed the river to escape from poverty for the first time, younger students tend to come to South Korea because of their parents' suggestion, in search of a better life'*. Nurim also noted, *'Nowadays North Koreans cannot cross the border without help from brokers and no small sum of money is required in this process. It seems almost impossible for the poor to cross the border'*. In the light of the two participants' comments, younger students were more likely to have had an ordinary life in relatively better conditions than older students, even though they were not living in rich circumstances. Although the accounts above seem not to be directly linked to the research questions of my current study, they suggest that it would be useful for future work to pay attention to the ordinariness of refugees' former lives in North Korea as well as focusing on their current vulnerability as a refugee. The difference in the

young people's experiences in North Korea also caused a type of 'generation gap' among students at the alternative schools, as will be discussed later.

Living in 'our' own world

As presented in the previous chapter, three alternative schools of the study helped young North Korean refugees adjust to South Korean society in various ways, and the young people viewed their experiences of alternative schools as a process of becoming independent citizens living in a new society. In this sense, this study finds that alternative schools have a certain positive influence on the integration of young North Korean refugees into South Korean society. However, the young people were concerned about a lack of opportunities to mingle naturally with South Korean peers because of the fact that the alternative schools were comprised only of students from North Korean refugee backgrounds.

It is worth noting that the schools offered a range of advantages as a homogenous group, particularly for the young people at the initial stage of adjustment. For example, participants were able to '*feel I belonged somewhere after coming to this school*' (Chanseul), to '*feel stable because of a strong sense of belonging*' among themselves (Nurim), and to '*understand and encourage each other*' as they '*have similar experiences*' (Dabin). This sense of belonging to school was also reported as a success by some participants. Nevertheless, some raised a more negative issue related to the school structure.

I think, for us, alternative school is like two sides of a coin. We have a strong sense of belonging among ourselves in the school. On the other hand, it seems to be very difficult to meet young South Koreans. Rather, I sometimes feel like I am isolated from the mainstream society and I doubt whether I can enter it well.

(Nurim, interview)

Six young people, who had enrolled in mainstream school immediately after finishing the social orientation programme at the state education centre (see chapter 2), noted that it was hard for an individual to be involved in a group of South Korean students because '*an existing unity bond among South Korean peers was too strong to enter into*' (Mira). Although all the six, fortunately, did not have any experiences

of explicit bullying or school violence at mainstream school, one said, *'it was difficult to forge a bond of friendship with South Korean classmates even though we seemed to get along just fine in classroom'* (Haegil). Meanwhile, some emphasised, *'we need to meet and mingle with South Koreans even if we would be hurt'* (Moa) because *'at some point, there will be no one who helps us and we should live with South Koreans. We should not live in our own world'* (Mira). In this sense, it was pointed out as one of the challenges that they *'made only friends from North Korea'* (Gaon), and *'had less opportunities to get along with South Koreans'* (Suri). Dodam felt *'a limited freedom'* in her circumstances, where she *'always meet friends from North Korea at school, meet them at home, and even met North Koreans at church'*. Most participants, but not all, had a similar experience of school life connecting school, home, and church (for some), as Dodam noted above. Under these circumstances, it appears to be hard to make South Korean friends in natural settings. Only one student (Gaon) tried to actively find more ways of getting along with South Koreans by herself, *'taking part in social activities outside school'*. Of course, this study found that the schools offered several programmes, such as one night and two days camps or summer project activities, for the purpose of arranging meetings for young people from the two Koreas. This, however, may not be enough for young people from North Korea to make a natural friendship with South Korean peers.

In particular, this challenging aspect tended to be highlighted among the students who used to be involved in general school settings. For instance, two female students said that they would have been at general school if they *'could catch up regular classes'* (Gaon) and *'could receive proper financial assistance'* (Haegil). Mira, who had had earlier experiences of both a general school and an alternative school and is currently attending university with South Korean students, told me:

It depends on what you really want. If you want to feel comfortable, I think you had better go to alternative school. But I can say that if you would go to a mainstream school, so much the better. It would be far harder than you expected. I experienced very wide and deep gaps between the North and South Korean students. ... I think, however, at that time, I could have adapted well to the mainstream school if there had been someone with me, who helped me, supported me, and understood me.

(Mira, interview)

Through her experiences across three types of schools (general school, alternative school and university) in South Korea, it can be seen that she learnt both the advantages and disadvantages of general school and alternative school, and what North Korean refugee students need to prepare for university life where they may begin in earnest their independent life away from teachers' help and protection. In the same vein, Haegil also said, *'If someone asks me which school I would choose, I can say that: If you would like to experience the real South Korean society, then go to mainstream school. If you would like to get more support, then go to alternative school'*. As a researcher, I was impressed that the students had a balanced understanding of the pros and cons of alternative school and some students (Gaon, Mira and Nurim) even offered suggestions for how to promote socialising with South Koreans in alternative school settings.

Overall, participants in the present study recognised the positive role of alternative school in considering young North Korean refugees' vulnerability, especially at the early stage of adjustment to South Korean society, as identified in chapter 5. However, they also understood that limited access to South Koreans might hinder their social development and successful integration into mainstream society. They also felt the necessity of mingling with South Koreans beyond *'the school fence'*. Here, there were two interesting points. One is that the young people were taking into consideration possible difficulties that they might face when going into mainstream society in earnest, with an emphasis that they should overcome those difficulties to *'keep living here in South Korea'* (Suri) *'as long as'* they *'did not leave South Korea again'* (Dabin). The other is that many participants (eight of the 12) emphasised the necessity of a significant person for their successful adjustment in South Korean society, with Mira remarking *'I could have adapted well to the mainstream school if there had been someone with me, who helped me, supported me, and understood me'*. In light of the two points, I would suggest that schools need to think more deeply about young North Korean refugees' agency to cope with the situation they are in currently and the importance of a significant person to those students in a vulnerable group.

Sense of loss

As one of the challenges that the students experienced, the majority of them in the study spoke about a sense of loss associated with the transition from the North to the South, such as the loss of parents and siblings, friends, the 'right' time for schooling, original personality and future dreams. The key issues raised by the young people are discussed below.

Parents and siblings

The current study has eight participants who had been separated from both their parents (Dodam, Moa, Nurim and Parang), or one parent (their fathers) (Dabin, Gaon, Haegil and Suri). Four of the eight (Dabin, Dodam, Nurim and Parang) mentioned in interviews that they had lost their family members due to their migration. The sense of loss was also expressed as a feeling of missing their family. This was most strongly expressed by Dodam who had been the most recent to enter South Korea, alone without both parents: *'I still think of my mother every day, every moment. I really miss my mother and the food she made'*. Another two young men residing in South Korea without both parents also said, *'I lost my parents in order to come to South Korea, but I cannot forget them'* (Nurim), and *'I do not have my parents now but I still have them. They are not here but they are always in my mind'* (Parang).

While two of the four (Dodam and Parang) did not share their detailed story of how they had been separated from their parents, the other two (Dabin and Nurim) gave me the details of their last moments of parting from their parents. Nurim had stayed for around four years near the border area between North Korea and China, waiting for the best time to cross the border. He recalled the moment of parting, about which he had always felt guilty. One day, his mother came to meet him and said to him, *'Just go and live your own life. You do not need to worry about us anymore'*. After that day, he could not get in touch with his parents any longer. Moreover, his hometown was an inland area of North Korea far away from the border and, therefore, it was not easy to contact his parents, no matter how much he received help from brokers. He thought that there was no way of reuniting with his parents except for the unification of the two Koreas. This desire for unification was also

found in Dabin. As described in chapter 5, she lost her father and brother during her period of escaping from North Korea. Although she had entered South Korea with her mother, she still suffered from emotional challenges due to the loss of her father and brother. She also said, *‘I really hope that the day of unification would come as soon as possible. Then, I want to visit my father’s grave and tell him how tough my life has been and how hard I have lived’*. As a South Korean citizen, I had viewed the topic of unification as a social and political, or a diplomatic issue, which needs to be considered at a national level rather than at an individual level. However, for Nurim and Dabin, unification might be the only way that they can reunite with their parents and siblings who are left in North Korea.

This study has four participants (Dodam, Moa, Nurim and Parang) residing in South Korea without both parents and Dodam, Nurim and Parang expressed their emotions at missing their parents left in North Korea as above. However, Moa said that she had been keeping in touch with her mother, currently residing in China, not adding comments about what kind of emotional challenge she has experienced in relation to her loss of family.

This study has four participants (Dabin, Gaon, Haegil and Suri), whose mothers are residing in South Korea. Gaon, Haegil and Suri did not express a feeling of missing their fathers or grief at being separated from their fathers when leaving North Korea. Rather, they recalled a negative memory associated with their fathers. For example, Gaon often witnessed her father assaulting her mother and experienced domestic violence by her father (see chapter 5). She stated that this was a main reason why she left her hometown. Haegil blamed her father’s irresponsibility in not supporting his family, saying *‘My mom went through all kinds of hardship to make money to raise my sister and me because my father did not do anything for the family’*. Somewhat differently, for Suri, her mother fled to China and re-married a Chinese man and gave birth to a daughter there. She, however, escaped again from the Chinese husband, leaving her daughter in China. She then came to South Korea and got married again, a Korean man, and gave birth to another son. Then she brought her first daughter, Suri, from North Korea through a broker. Suri finally reunited with her mother in South Korea. Here, she did not explain in detail what had happened

between her mother and father in North Korea, what she had experienced with her father, and why her mother had fled from her Chinese husband. She also did not make any comment here on her fathers while telling her family story as above. Instead, Suri felt sympathy for her half-sister, saying *'I can understand how she felt when my mother left her alone with her father in China because I experienced the same thing when my mother left me in North Korea'*.

The young people expressed multifaceted emotional challenges regarding their loss and separation from their family members even though the individuals experienced them differently. Similarly, Tay et al. (2016) suggest that young refugees may be at risk of 'complicated grief' due to the traumatic loss of those close to them.

Friends

Bada, Haegi and Mira described a feeling of missing their hometown friends, with whom they had spent their childhood in North Korea. For example, one told me:

I was in middle school at that time when I left my hometown. I had some close friends there but I was not allowed to say where I was going to them. My last word was just 'hello' when I met them in front of my house. That was the last moment that I saw my friends. I really miss them.

(Mira, interview)

Haegil also said, *'I still feel lonely as my close friends are not with me anymore'*. The two participants felt *'sad'* that they had lost someone with whom they could *'speak honestly'* their *'innermost feelings'* to. Missing old friendships may be reinforced by being less satisfied with new friendships in South Korea. All three had had earlier experience of mainstream school. They were more likely to have a negative impression of South Korean peers whom they had met at school, describing them as *'selfish'*, *'only interested in themselves'* (Bada), *'no interest in others'* (Mira), and *'self-centred'*, with one remarking *'they seemed to approach me when they thought they could get something beneficial from me'* (Haegil).

Bearing in mind the small number of the three participants above, it is important to avoid generalisations about South Korean students and their attitudes towards young

North Korean refugees in mainstream school settings. In addition, other positive views of South Korean peers were shared by other participants. Nevertheless, it would be worth noting these responses and exploring what factors make friendship between young people from the two Koreas superficial and why the young refugees miss their earlier friendships with old friends in their hometowns so much. Meanwhile, some participants encountered challenging situations when they formed friendships with other young North Korean refugees in alternative school settings, as shown in the following section on 'Relationships affected by trauma'.

The 'right' time for schooling

Another type of feeling of loss is related to '*lost time*' during their transition period, which was mentioned by Dabin, Dodam, Nurim and Parang. They thought that they had lost the '*right time for getting an education*' and '*preparing for the future earlier than now*' and, as a result, they became '*left behind by other South Korean peers*'. For example, Parang (aged 24) said, '*I sometime felt frustrated that I started my elementary course at a later age. It was like an endless tunnel. I wished I had started earlier*'. Dabin (aged 27) also said, '*I would have been already graduated from university and I would be working now if I had not missed the time and I had studied like others of my age*'. Nurim (aged 24) also thought that he had '*wasted*' his time waiting for a broker near the border. Although Dodam (aged 19) is younger than the other three, she also felt that she had wasted her past time doing nothing. All the four felt that they would be better off now if they had not lost time and had received a suitable education earlier in their lives. This feeling of loss of an appropriate time to prepare for the future may also be understood in connection to a sense of the futility of their past lives in North Korea. For example, Mira felt that everything she had done in the past was '*in vain*'. She used to receive a formal school education in a relatively stable home background in North Korea. Nevertheless, she stated that her previous efforts in North Korea appeared to be '*useless*' in her current life.

I felt the futility of what I had done in the past. I really had done everything hard. I had polished the leader's portrait and statue every morning. ... It was felt like that everything I had done, learnt, and heard in North Korea became useless and even wrong, and needed to be thrown away.

(Mira, interview)

Notably, they felt frustrated that they had difficulty in following their current education and felt left behind by other South Koreans of their ages, due to the lost time in their past lives. Similarly, one study found that North Korean refugee young people tend to feel a sense of loss when they realise the wide gap in academic ability compared to South Korean adolescents (Na, 2011).

'Myself' and future dreams

Six of the 12 participants talked about having *'lost myself'* as one of the key challenges that they experienced. They thought that they had lost positive aspects of their original characters. For example, Haegil said, *'I used to be a patient person but not now'*, Dabin noted, *'I lost my self-esteem and my own thoughts'*, Moa said, *'I was a talkative person before, but I have been just keeping silent from some time'*. Dabin, Moa and Suri stated that they had lost their *'own'* opinions and preferences while undergoing the transition from the North to the South, for example, saying *'I do not know what I really like. I forgot the last time when I told someone what I want'* (Suri).

Some spoke about their unfulfilled dreams, for instance, becoming a journalist (Nurim), a human-rights lawyer (Haegil), and a designer (Dabin). They said that they had abandoned what they *'really wanted to do'*, and instead, they were thinking of getting a *'practical'* and *'stable'* job in consideration of their current status as a North Korean refugee. They also added that it would be unrealistic to try to achieve their dreams in South Korea. One told me:

Although most of us have our own dream and what we want to do, we are likely to give up the dream easily because we are North Korean refugees. ... I watched on the news that there was the first North Korean refugee who became a civil servant in the government. What does this mean? There seems to still be a high barrier to getting into mainstream society and only limited options that we can choose to work in.

(Haegil, interview)

From the findings so far, Dabin (aged 27), the oldest female student, appears to have the most dramatic story among young refugees in the study. She endured the longest migration journey in transit countries and a tragic experience when she was sent back to North Korea and forcibly put in prison. In addition, she lost her father and brother.

By way of contrast, Jinsol (aged 17), one of the three youngest students, who had escaped from North Korea and entered South Korea with her whole family, and had a relatively stable process of adjustment, did not express any sense of loss during the study. This study would suggest that the variety and complexity of individuals' vulnerabilities needs to be considered when designing support programmes or making relevant policies for helping students from North Korean refugee backgrounds.

Relationships affected by trauma

The present study has seven participants who noted that traumatic past experiences affected their current schooling and daily lives. As previously presented, three young women had experienced a type of violent and threatening situation in North Korea and in China: violence at home from her father and step-father (Gaon), threatening words and actions in a prison (Dabin), and human trafficking and sexual abuse (Haegil). All three stated that the past terrible experiences had a negative influence on their present in some ways. In fact, most young refugees in the study, but not all, also talked about their experiences facing danger or threat during the migration journey, although they did not all link such experiences to their present lives.

In light of the comments by the three above, they seem to have different ways of reacting to their traumatic experiences: externalising and internalising behaviour. As an example of reacting outwardly, Haegil, who had been trafficked by a Chinese man, said that she became '*angry*', '*intolerant*', and '*impatient*' when feeling overpowered by someone, such as male teachers, and she then expressed her emotions externally:

One day after the regular service at school, a physical education teacher called and scolded me as I made a noise and disturbed the service. I just sat in front of the teacher and he kept making a push to say 'it is my fault' for around 30 minutes. I was suddenly reminded of the time when I had been in China. I had been beaten and blamed because I had not answered quickly. I just cried loudly as I was so upset and I felt the same as when I had sat in front of that Chinese man. I was so angry and so I did not say sorry to the teacher in the end. I was just crying.

(Haegil, interview)

She felt ‘*upset*’ and ‘*angry*’ when teachers forced her to do something, ‘*giving a command, not persuading*’. This externalising expression of her anger also caused some conflicts with friends as well. She said, ‘*I sometimes burst into sudden anger without specific reasons with my close friends and fought with them because of it*’. In a similar way, these kind of conflicts among students from North Korean refugee backgrounds at alternative schools were also reported by some participants (Bada, Dabin, Moa, Mira and Suri), for example, with Moa reporting, ‘*we can understand each other very well as we have similar hurt, but we also open up the wounds when we fight as we know very well where is most hurtful*’.

While the outward reactions to trauma could take the form of expressing anger towards others, some reacted to trauma internally. Gaon said, ‘*I felt a big grief sometimes hit over me*’ and ‘*I suddenly felt sad and tears fell from my eyes*’ when her negative memory of the past came into her mind. The others also mentioned their feelings of depression (Chanseul, Dodam, Haegil and Moa) and low self-confidence (Dabin and Suri) due to the effects of the past.

Five of the students spoke about having a girlfriend or a boyfriend. This may be one of the main interests for the young people, taking into account their ages. While two of the five expressed their interests in a relationship, the other three thought that it would be difficult currently to have a healthy relationship because they were not yet entirely recovered from their past wounds. A young man wanted to ‘*meet a girlfriend after recovering from depression*’ (Chanseul), but the other two females said that they had already given up on the idea of having a boyfriend.

As can be seen, relationships with others seemed to be deeply affected by the young refugees’ past traumatic experiences in pre-migration and migration. Their current lives were also influenced by the uncertainty of the future, which will now be discussed below.

Worries about the future

At the outset of the study, my views of time and space within the research topic were limited to ‘within a school’ and ‘at present’, as I intended to explore the young

people's challenges and successes in school settings. The participants' accounts, however, extended beyond school and to their futures as well as the past. As presented already, some of challenges that young refugee participants faced were connected to their past experiences. In addition to this, there were challenging aspects associated with the future which will now be discussed.

For the short-term future, five participants were concerned about university life that they would experience in one or two years' time. The worries were generally about '*becoming independent*' (Bada) and '*going into mainstream society in earnest*' (Nurm) after they enter university. They worried about whether they '*can do well alone without the teacher's hand*' (Dabin) and about where they '*can get help at university*' (Parang). In addition, some were anxious about how they would mingle with South Koreans in person and at university. In particular, two of the five were concerned about study at university in comparison with their South Korean peers, saying, for example, '*I doubt whether I can follow them or not*' (Chanseul), and '*I am not prepared enough to study with South Korean students at university*' (Bada). Meanwhile, there were voices of concern from another two (Dabin and Nurim) as to whether they would '*be accepted*' when they revealed the fact that they were from North Korea. Here, it is interesting to note that both used the same phrase of '*being accepted*' even though they were from different schools and interviewed separately. This may reflect a common perception about becoming integrated into South Korean society among young North Korean refugees. As noted earlier, nearly all participants (11 of the 12) expressed their view of social integration as a one-way process, in which they needed to make efforts to adjust to the society, rather than ask South Koreans to make changes, or to look for mutual understanding.

Their concerns for university life can be summarised in three points: a) living independently in South Korean society away from the protection and help of the teacher and school; b) a lower level of knowledge compared to South Korean students; c) being accepted into the mainstream society of South Koreans. They appeared to be less confident and somewhat daunted about the coming future. This group of five participants were over school age and older than South Korean peers, and all four male students in this study were included in the group.

Looking beyond the immediate future, three female students expressed concerns about their future dreams and careers. Jinsol wanted to find what she *‘really want to do’* and her *‘own dream, like what other people have’*, and the other two felt a gap between a feeling of reality and ideal dreams. Haegil was learning to cook for a future job at that time of the study, but she said, *‘I actually want to be a lawyer but I do not seem to have that much ability’*. Gaon was concerned about her mother, saying *‘I want to go to an engineering college and work in the field of IT. However, I need to get a job as soon as possible in order to lessen my mother’s burden’*. All three were female and younger students (aged 17), and worried about future jobs and dreams, although they had different types of concerns. While the older students worried about the relatively near future that they would face at university soon, the concerns of younger students were about careers and dreams further into the future. Although these kinds of concerns seem to be similar to general teenager-angst among South Korean adolescents (Statistics Korea and Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, 2015), in my view, the young people from North Korea appear to feel their worries about the future much more strongly due to their vulnerable situation as refugees.

Difficulties within the school

Turning now to findings on academic progress and achievement, all 12 participants reported their difficulties in learning English, maths, science or Korean. This is in keeping with previous research which discusses North Korean refugee students’ academic performance (Lee, 2007; Maeng and Gil, 2013; Na, 2011). As these subjects are regarded as core subjects in South Korean secondary schools, in fact, the difficulty of learning those subjects is not limited to North Korean refugee students. Besides, the current study also found some challenges concerning the features of alternative school, now described below.

Less ‘school-like’ atmosphere

Although most participants agreed that they felt better able to work well in alternative schools because of the level of support, as noted in chapter 5, some negative aspects of alternative school that may hinder students from concentrating on

studying were also reported by seven young people (Bada, Chanseul, Dabin, Haegil, Jinsol, Mira and Nurim). Four (Bada, Haegil, Jinsol and Mira) of the seven had had earlier experience of general school. They stressed that alternative school was less focused on study than general school, noting that students at alternative school tended to '*participate in various kinds of activities*' (Bada) or '*spend more time playing*' (Mira) rather than focusing on study. One of the possible reasons may be linked to special admission requirements for North Korean refugee young people into South Korean universities. Jinsol said:

We, young North Korean refugees, can relatively easily go to a university through a special admission system. We therefore do not need to study hard like South Korean students. Naturally most students here tend not to study hard at school. For me, I am easily influenced by my surroundings. If someone sitting next me studies hard, I will definitely study hard, but I do not study hard as I am not stimulated and less motivated in this school climate.

(Jinsol, group discussion)

In general high school, South Korean students tend to study very hard under the competitive educational environment to enter top level universities. On the other hand, it appears to be relatively easy for North Korean refugee students to go to university by having special selection criteria applied to them. Therefore, it is understandable that they are likely to be less motivated to study hard than those in general schools because they may feel less burdened by the university entrance exam. Although Jinsol indicated that there was not enough stimulation to focus on study, she had a negative view of the competitive atmosphere of general school.

In addition, the study atmosphere may also be affected by the fact that the percentage of students who seek for a job after graduation is higher at alternative schools than at general schools. For example, Bada said, '*Here in this school, there are many students who want to get a job right after graduation. Those students have no reasons to study hard like others aiming to go to university*', and Haegil also noted, '*it looks like students who have different interests are in the same class. In fact, some preparing for work seem not to be interested in study*'. In the mainstream education system, most students decide whether to go to general high school or to go to

vocational high school, when they graduate middle school, depending on future plans. Therefore, in general high school settings, it would be hard to find students who seek employment straight after graduation from high school, as the majority aim to go to university. On the other hand, in alternative school settings, it is highly likely that students who have different plans for the future coexist in a school or even in a classroom. Therefore, different interests and purposes of individual students may conflict within a school setting.

Meanwhile, Dabin and Nurim said that the less strict school regulations might be a hindrance in creating a climate in which students could focus on their studies. Chanseul also gave the view that alternative schools looked like a mixture of formal school and informal *hagwon* (meaning ‘private education institution’). In addition, some felt as though the classroom atmosphere was unstable, due to the frequent moving in and out of school by students. For example, students dropping out or new students moving in in the middle of an academic semester. Accordingly, the classroom atmosphere often changed and the students were affected by it. In particular, Nurim indicated that a non-accredited school was more likely to be informal than a state-accredited school because non-accredited schools did not offer an official high school diploma. Because of these factors, young North Korean refugees’ schooling at non-accredited alternative schools was more likely to be maintained by teachers’ efforts or other personal reasons rather than by formal school systems or regulations, as previously mentioned (see chapter 5). While this informality of alternative school can create a family-like atmosphere and close relationships between school members, it is also more likely to make alternative school a less ‘*school-like*’ atmosphere.

Age gaps among students in mixed-age classes

Classes in the three alternative schools of the study were streamed by students’ academic ability or study purposes, not chronological age. Four participants over school age (Chanseul, Dabin, Dodam and Parang) related another stressful situation. One told me:

I initially felt desperate that I studied from the beginning with younger students. ... Whenever I realised 'I am older than others', I felt depressed in comparing myself with other younger students, because I was doing poorly despite being older.

(Parang, interview)

Within the system of mixed-age classes, while students can take courses suitable for their levels, older students may face a challenge relating to study with younger students, as illustrated in the quotation above. When older students in the study felt that younger students learnt more quickly and performed better than themselves, they were '*depressed*' and '*desperate*' (Parang), '*less confident*' (Dabin), and '*daunted*' (Chanseul), with one noting, '*I often read other younger classmates' faces when I asked some easy questions in class*' (Nurim).

Some also reported a kind of generation gap between the older and the younger, for instance, in attitudes towards school teachers (Bada and Dabin) and in play culture (Mira and Nurim). The former two said that younger students' attitudes towards their teachers were somewhat '*unthoughtful*' (Bada), '*impolite*' (Dabin), and the latter indicated that, '*some school activities are seen as childish*' (Mira) and '*extra curriculum tends to be organised in considering younger students' preferences*' (Nurim). In addition to a kind of generation gap, Dabin, Mira and Nurim also felt some burdens in taking care of younger students and difficulty in maintaining a good relationship with them. Bada was also concerned that the challenging situation of an age gap would continue at university. On the other hand, they also had a feeling of achievement when they managed the difficulties successfully. This successful experience is presented in more detail in a later section.

This type of challenge associated with the age gap may be understood in the light of Korean culture in which people tend to establish the order of hierarchy based on age. Age functions as a foundation for building relationships (Moon and Han, 2013). Likewise, existing literature shows that senior-junior relationships based on age and school year are very strict and important in South Korean schools (Hong and Yu, 2007). With this cultural background, it would be challenging to study in a classroom with others of a different age. The current study did not find younger students who

expressed their difficulty in studying with older students in a classroom. Rather, the younger students felt close to older students *'like older brothers and sisters'*, comparing this to the earlier experiences at general schools where they had faced strict senior-junior relationships. In this study, the challenges caused by the age gap were found among older students.

Experiences of successes

As seen from the findings so far, young North Korean refugees in the study experienced a wide range of challenges, both inside and outside the schools. The findings show that it is still not easy for these young refugees to settle in a South Korea as ordinary citizens. The following section explores successes that the young people experienced in alternative school settings. At the outset of the study, I did not define the meaning of 'success', but rather tried to explore its meaning in discussion with the participants themselves. Their understandings of success were chiefly linked to *'achieving something'*, *'making good a deficiency'* or *'fulfilling needs'*. Contrary to my initial expectation that success would be understood largely as academic achievement, the young people experienced a sense of success in various areas, as described below.

Feeling of belonging

The present study has no participants who expressed a feeling of belonging to South Korean society. However, a sense of belonging to school was mentioned by four young people (Chanseul, Dodam, Mira and Nurim). Of the four, in particular, Chanseul and Nurim viewed it as their first successful experience in South Korea, that they felt a sense of belonging by enrolling at alternative school. For example, Nurim said, *'that I belong to somewhere was one of the biggest achievements that I had here in South Korea'*. He continued by saying, *'To be honest, it is difficult to feel a sense of belonging to the society, but I can feel strongly that I belong to the school'*.

In light of the findings of the study, I would suggest that young North Korean refugees may experience different types of belonging to a school depending on

which kind of school they are enrolled at: alternative school or general school. It seems that belonging to an alternative school is not just belonging to a school, but rather belonging to a community with people of similar backgrounds. This may be understood in connection to ‘social bonds’ (Ager and Strang, 2008) built on a concept of social capital, as suggested by Putman (1993; 1995). This highlights a strong relationship within a community of similar people. However, North Korean refugee students in general schools are more likely to experience a different type of belonging to a heterogeneous group which also consists of South Koreans. This is discussed further in chapter 7.

Students may experience a type of achievement in the process of successfully making social bonds within an alternative school. For example, Chanseul said, *‘It was a nice feeling for me to be accepted warmly by others at school unlike my initial expectation that they might keep a distance from me. ... We became close to each other and talked comfortably’*. Mira, who had already finished school, said that alternative school was like *‘a hometown’* as she did *‘not need to have a feeling of tension, at least within the school’*. She expressed it as a successful experience that she made her second hometown while looking back at school days in an interview. The belonging to a community of people with similar backgrounds may contribute to young refugees’ integration into a host society by providing a foundation for resettlement (Elliott and Yusuf, 2014). On the other hand, as previously noted, some students at alternative schools felt challenged because they had less opportunity to make social connections with South Koreans as the bonds within a homogeneous group were getting stronger. This view may reflect their eagerness to be more engaged in South Korean society as an active agent, beyond simply learning and knowing about the society, as mentioned earlier.

Playing a meaningful role

In the current study, some felt a sense of success when they contributed to others or a community by playing *‘a meaningful role’*. This appeared in a variety of settings. Four older students (Bada, Dabin, Jinsol and Parang), they felt successful when they could give advice and help to younger students who underwent difficulties in

schooling. Bada felt rewarded when he took part in making breakfast for other students every morning. He shared his feeling with a photo below:

Picture 6.2 Excerpt from Photovoice (7)



Here, almost all students eat breakfast together at school. I have been working preparing breakfast every morning. I feel very rewarded when I see the students eating the food that I have made for them. It is so worth the effort.

(Bada, photo-task session)

Another type of meaningful role was found by Chanseul and Haegil. They were elected as student representatives. Although they had not started the duties of the position at the time of the study, they felt successful in having a special position within the school. They both expressed their eagerness and willingness to perform the duty well.

I was elected to one of student representatives and I will be playing a role from next semester. I would like to do something that ex-representatives did not try to do. ... After the role was given to me, I came to change my mind. I also think about how I can do it well and how I can make a contribution through the role. If I did not have this kind of role, I would only think just about what I can get from school.

(Chanseul, interview)

As seen in the quotation, a sense of responsibility and empowerment seems to underlie the feeling of success in achieving the position. In a similar way, three participants reported their experiences of participating in voluntary work, such as visiting an orphanage (Haegil) or nursing home (Dodam), or street cleaning (Gaon).

Not long ago, I took part in voluntary work in a nursing home. At that time, I talked with old women there and listened to their stories as well. ... The old women looked happy when I tried to please them and I also sang a song for them. ... Looking at the women's happy faces, I felt like I was an important person to them.

(Dodam, interview)

By participating in voluntary work, the participants came to have a positive perception of themselves. For example, they were able to view themselves as a valuable person who could help other people (Bada and Dodam). It seems that the young people understood success in line with this kind of positive feeling. The latest statistics may also be linked to this finding. That is, among 10,481 North Korean refugee students who entered a university from 2014 to 2016, students studying social work occupied the highest ratio at 25.9% (Jang et al., 2017).

Here, it would be worth noting that all six participants who talked about taking a meaningful role were from school 1. This school, as a state-accredited school, was relatively big and had a larger number of students, compared to schools 2 and 3. This may be connected to the school system of running this kind of school work, facilitating students' participation. Additionally, this study also found that most aspects of extra-curricular activities in the three alternative schools were run with the involvement of the local community, local churches, NGOs or individual volunteers. Regarding this, the two small schools (2 and 3) appeared to have more difficulty in securing funding and volunteers, while the bigger school (1) was connected with more sponsors, not only at an individual level but also at an institutional level. Although discerning the difference in the quality and quantity of support depending on school size and type was not a main aim of the current study, further investigation on this topic would be necessary in future research to improve the support for young North Korean refugees.

Having a mentor

As seen earlier, limited opportunities to meet South Koreans were pointed out as a challenge by most participants, though not all. In this study, only one participant (Nurim) spoke about a significant South Korean who had influenced him. He called

the person a ‘mentor’, saying ‘*one of the most successful experiences at the school was that I had my mentor whom I could speak with any time I was in difficulty*’. He continued to say, showing the photo below:

Picture 6.3 Excerpt from Photovoice (8)



He always encourages me to seek what I really want to do. I previously told him that I wanted to be a journalist in the future. I thought that it would be impossible for me, but he knew how much I liked writing. ... The other day, he sent me these books about developing writing skills and encouraged me to keep writing. I was very motivated by him.

(Nurim, photo-task session)

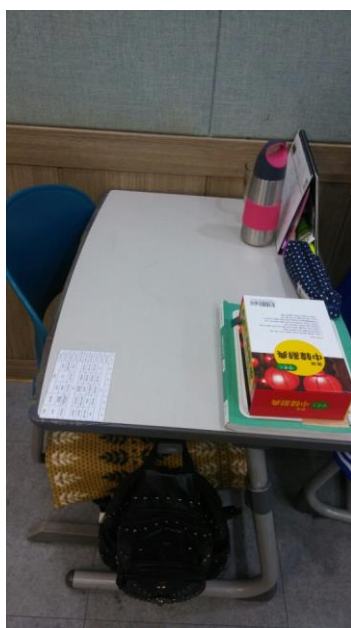
In some areas, challenges and successes that the refugee students experienced at school appear to have positive and negative aspects. While the students viewed ‘*a lack of something*’ as a challenge, they seemed to feel a sense of success when their needs were fulfilled. For example, the low level of academic performance was a challenging aspect for refugee students in this study; however, they felt a sense of achievement and regarded it as a success when they passed an exam or gained a good grade. Likewise, some in the study stated the need for a significant person as a ‘mentor’ who would ‘*listen to*’, ‘*understand*’ and ‘*lead*’ them. It seemed to be difficult for them, however, to have a South Korean mentor. In this context, the absence of a significant person was also understood as a challenge by some participants (Dabin, Haegil, Moa, Nurim and Parang). Although this section is composed of the findings from only one person, his experience of having a mentor provides us with a starting point for a discussion about the importance of a significant person for North Korean refugee young people.

Academic achievement

As previously noted, it was regarded as a key element for successful integration into South Korean society to gain a high school diploma or to go to university among young North Korean refugees in the study. In this context, it is understandable that the young people understood academic achievement as one of the successes that they experienced at school. This academic achievement was described in several ways. Five of the 12 participants (Dabin, Dodam, Gaon, Moa and Parang) said that they passed the middle school (or high school) qualification exam. The students from school 1 did not need to take the high school qualification exam because the school was able to offer a high school diploma as a state-accredited school. However, the students from schools 2 and 3 could not receive the diploma from the schools and they, therefore, had to take an extra qualification exam. This applies only to a high-school course. Therefore, regardless of school type (state-accredited or non-accredited), all the students should take a qualification exam to gain a middle school diploma.

Dabin, as the oldest student, articulated her feeling of success in completing a full course of schooling. She said in a photo-task session:

Picture 6.4 Excerpt from Photovoice (9)



This is my desk space at school and I spent most of the day here at this desk. ... I had many moments when I felt frustrated but I made it in the end. I passed all exams and almost completed all courses. ... I just want to compliment myself.

(Dabin, photo-task session)

Mira and Parang recalled the moment that they were '*offered a place at a university*' as a successful experience at the schools. In particular, they both understood '*entering a university*' as '*a gateway to fulfilling a dream*', for example, Parang said '*I found out my life goal and dream and passed all the procedure of entering a university where I can achieve my dream*'. Mira also entered a college of nursing with her dream to '*build a medical centre for people in North Korea after unification*'. It is interesting to note that they both had a commonality in that their future dreams were related to making a meaningful contribution to their hometowns in North Korea, especially for improving health and well-being.

Changes in oneself

The experiences of success so far appear to be linked to external factors, such as social bonds, social connections, school curriculum, academic achievement and making a meaningful contribution for others. In addition, six participants experienced positive changes in themselves and defined it as a success in their school life. Gaon, Mira and Suri reported that they were transformed to be '*more confident*', '*positive*' and '*stable*'. In particular, all the six students indicated that they came to think and view life '*positively*' after coming to the alternative schools. Two of the six (Gaon and Mira) heard from people around them that they had changed to become more '*bright*' and '*stable*' than the past, when they had been '*timid*', '*irritable*' and '*shaded*'.

Another aspect of success that the young people defined was associated with their own will and efforts to '*become independent*', for example, saying '*I tried to do something by myself without seeking help from others*' (Moa), '*I search for something that I want to know in person instead of asking the teachers*' (Gaon), and '*I made a plan by myself and carried it out as best I can*' (Haegil). Chanseul also described his effort to '*stand by myself*' and make his own decision with a photo of a subway station.

Picture 6.5 Excerpt from Photovoice (10)



When I came out from Hanawon, I could not do anything by myself. Most of all, I was so daunted by everything unfamiliar. ... One day, I decided to start my own journey by myself. I bought a subway ticket and went to the city centre and a big shopping mall, and bought groceries. ... I also chose this school as my own decision. I did all these things by myself.

(Chanseul, photo-task session)

He repeatedly used the phrase '*by myself*' in order to stress his own will, decision, and effort. All the four also felt '*proud*', '*pleased*' and '*rewarded*' when they tried to do something independently and achieved it successfully.

Coping with difficulties

While this study explored how they understood challenges and how they overcame them, it was clear from the findings that they used several strategies to help them cope with their challenging situations. I include these coping strategies as a category of success because they expressed the positive feelings of overcoming the difficulties and seeking a better future, although they did not use the word 'success' explicitly.

One of the strategies was to talk with close friends when they had a problem or difficulty. This was shared by five participants (Bada, Dodam, Haegil, Jinsol and Moa). They could '*be away from the problem*', '*release stress*' or '*find a solution*' while talking with friends. Here, '*close friends*' were all of the same status, being North Korean refugees in South Korea, and, understandably, they could share experiences. While such a shared experience as a refugee sometimes caused conflicts

between friends, as previously noted, it seems that they could understand each other and form a bond of sympathy.

Meanwhile, most participants, but not all, used a strategy of '*spending time alone*', such as '*thinking the matter alone*' (Chanseul) or '*just being patient*' (Dabin), when having emotional challenges. For example, Gaon said, '*I just look up at the sky and comfort myself when I feel sad and depressed*'. In a similar way, Dabin, Haegil and Mira also kept their concerns or anger inside themselves. This kind of strategy may be understood in the light of their experiences of transition journeys where they were not able to ask for what they wanted and express their own feelings properly, such as through words: '*I always had to keep patient in China because I would have been caught if I had expressed my anger*' (Haegil). Dabin, Gaon and Mira said that they depended on their religion on the whole rather than seeking a solution from friends or others: '*praying to God*' and '*talking with God*'. This pattern of a coping strategy is also reported by one study with 338 Somali and Oromo refugee young people aged 18-25 (Halcón et al., 2004). The young refugees mostly chose to spend time alone as a coping strategy, praying (55.3%), sleeping (39.9%) and reading (32.3%), rather than talking to friends (27.8%).

In this study, eight of the 12 participants tried to interpret their life journey through the past and the present in a meaningful way. Five of the eight expressed their past and present as 'a process' for going forwards to a better future, for example, with the photos of a road (Bada, Chanseul and Jinsol) or stairs (Gaon) and the shape of a tower (Moa).

Picture 6.6 Example of photos including the meaning of a ‘process’



In particular, the young people reflected on their challenging past and present experiences in the photos. Taking an example of Jinsol:

Picture 6.7 Excerpt from Photovoice (11)



This is my way to school. I start and finish my day on this path. I use the same way every day but it gives me different feelings. Some days I feel tired, and some I feel more tired. There are no days that I do not feel tired as this is an uphill road. However, this is the only way that I can go to school, and I cannot go to school without this way. This looks like my whole life. Of course it feels hard while walking on the road, but I am expecting that I can see a beautiful day at the end of the way.

(Jinsol, photo-task session)

While talking about the photos, the young people anticipated that their lives would not be easy in South Korea and they might face a range of challenges, expressing this as being ‘*tough to go up*’, ‘*the tower can fall while I build it*’ and ‘*I may fall down*

while going'. It seems that they conveyed a meaning that they were in a process now through the words 'go' and 'build' and they also used the words 'tough' and 'fall' in order to express challenges that they might face in the process. At the same time, it was seen that they would like to talk about the hope that they had, using the phrases 'someday I can arrive', 'I will achieve it soon' and 'I can complete'.

It was also found that the participants made efforts 'not to regret' the past and 'to find something valuable' from the hardship that they had experienced. Three of the eight (Haegil, Mira and Parang) thought that they had potential for understanding people in need and helping them because they had already had a tough experience, with Parang saying, 'I know how much help they need as it was painful when I was alone', and Haegil noting that 'I can help people with deep trouble with my heart as I have already undergone such a big hardship in my life'.

As shown so far, young North Korean refugees in the study tried to create their lives in their own ways by giving the experiences of their past and present lives some meaning. I would say that this was a coping strategy in that the young people overcame their difficulties in a positive way. From a perspective of resilience, a variety of sources of resilience were found from the data, at a personal level as well as at an institutional level. This is worth discussing further in the context of previous research on young refugees and resilience (Carlson et al., 2012; Davy et al., 2014; Montgomery, 2010).

Here, it is also interesting to note that the photos that participants brought to the photo-task sessions were mostly associated with successful experiences. On the other hand, challenges or negative experiences were largely dealt with in one-to-one settings.

Summary

The findings in this chapter presented challenges and successes that 12 North Korean refugee young people experienced in alternative school settings. Key challenges centred on the following: the young people felt challenged when their identity as a refugee from North Korea was revealed to South Koreans with negative feelings of

bias toward North Koreans, and also the effect of media which strengthened the bias and negative views of North Korean refugees. Young North Korean refugees in the study desired to live as ordinary people in South Korean society, not as refugees. Their concern at disclosing their identity is extended to the future after graduation from the current schools. As another aspect of challenges faced, this study found a sense of loss that the young people experienced during their transition from the North to the South, such as loss of parents, siblings and friends, the appropriate time to prepare themselves for a better future, their original personality, and future dreams. This study also revealed findings about past traumatic experiences and their impact on the young refugees' relationships with others as well as themselves. The young people were also concerned about the uncertainty of the future, which were related to graduation from the schools, to getting a job and achieving their dreams.

Meanwhile, some challenges and successes that the young people experienced were associated more directly with academic performance and the school environment. For example, English was revealed as the most challenging subject. The informality of alternative school, due to a less academically-focused atmosphere and less strict school regulations, was also felt to be a challenging aspect by some students, although the informality was understood as an advantage of alternative schooling by offering a family-like atmosphere among students and teachers, and a strong sense of a bond between students. On the other hand, the young people felt a sense of achievement of all the courses at alternative schools as a success.

The present study also found the challenges and successes created by the feature of alternative schools as homogenous groups, which accommodate only students from North Korean refugee backgrounds. The young North Korean refugees had difficulty in mingling with South Korean peers in that they had only a few opportunities to meet South Koreans within alternative school settings. However, a strong sense of belonging to the school was regarded as a success and also played a positive role in the young refugees' integration. The young people felt a sense of success when they made a contribution to the schools and community by playing a meaningful role, for example as a volunteer or as a school representative. Several strategies that the young people used to cope with difficulties were also presented in this chapter. It is

reasonable that this study includes those coping strategies as a category of success because they expressed their positive feelings of overcoming the difficulties and seeking a better future even though they did not express the word ‘success’ explicitly.

Chapter 7 Discussion

Introduction

This chapter begins by reviewing the study so far with a visualisation of key findings and discussion topics of the study. It then goes on to discuss the key findings derived from the fieldwork and reflects on these in the context of existing studies and theories. Firstly, the findings of young North Korean refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools are discussed, drawing on a framework of refugee integration, developed by Ager and Strang (2004; 2008) and its applied study, Atfield et al. (2007). I draw an overall picture of what the young people experience in alternative school settings and discuss how the experiences are related to their integration into South Korean society. This chapter then considers the findings on the young people's successes and challenges in alternative school settings. These are largely associated with social and emotional areas of needs that the young people felt were being fulfilled or not fulfilled, for example, building social relationships with South Koreans or recovering from trauma. Social aspects of integration and the effects of trauma and the resilience of young people are discussed here. Lastly, a discussion on teachers at alternative schools, revealed as a significant factor in the young people's schooling but also day-to-day lives, is provided at the end of this chapter.

Review of the study so far

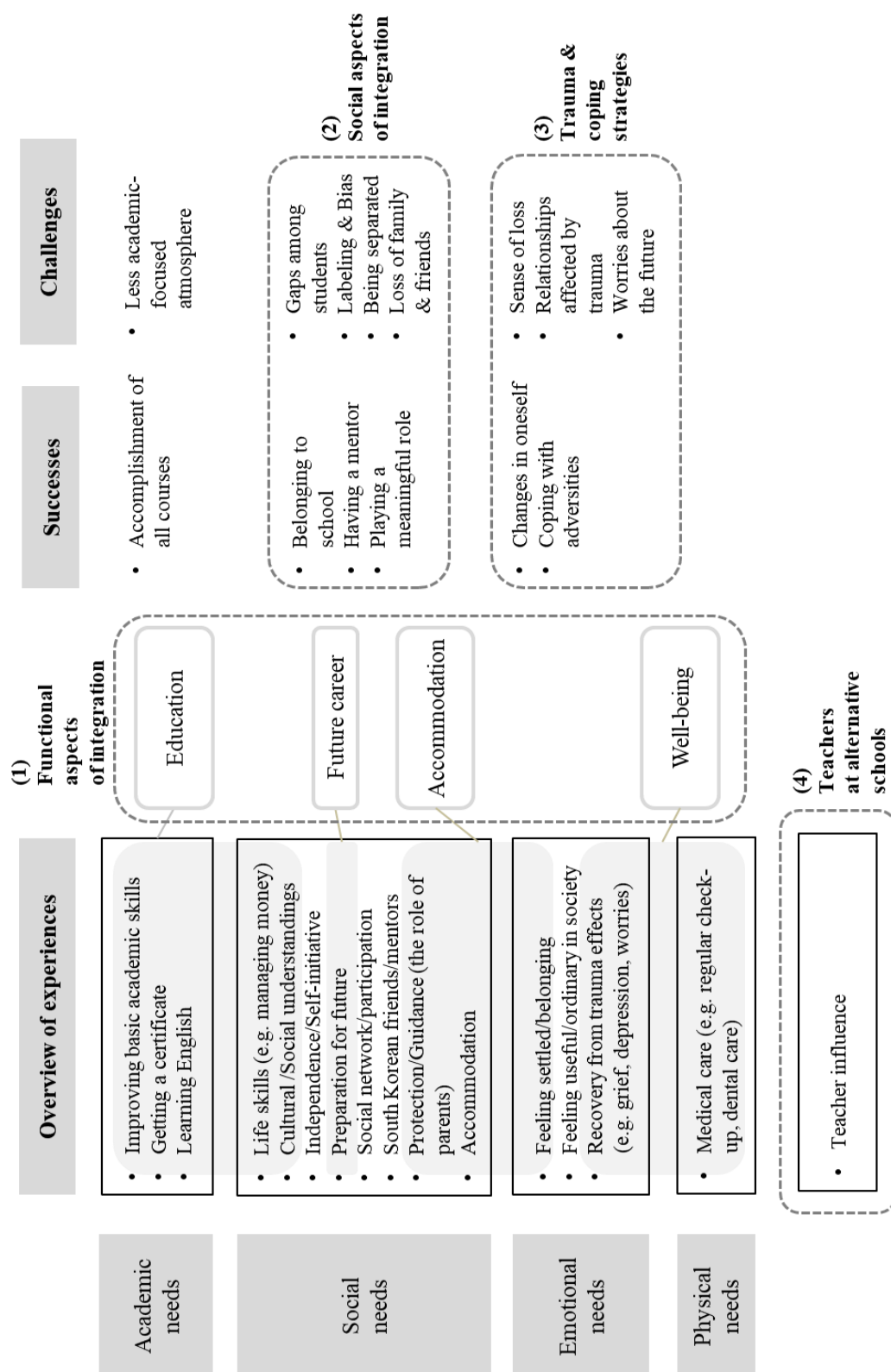
Before going into the main discussion, this section briefly summarises the journey of how this study has been carried out so far. This study was set up for the purpose of filling key gaps in knowledge about effective approaches to education for North Korean refugee students, focusing on challenges and successes that young North Korean refugees experience in alternative school settings. While school has been regarded as an important place for those young people, it is hard to find existing literature that comprehensively explores what they experience in school settings and how these school experiences are connected to the young refugees' integration into a new society. In particular, alternative education for young North Korean refugees has

been an under-researched area up to the present, although one third of the total of these refugee students in high school age are involved in alternative schools and the majority of young refugee people over school-going age choose alternative education. The young people may have special experiences different to those enrolled in general schools. It is, therefore, necessary to investigate alternative schools set up for young North Korean refugees in order to help them and support better.

To produce rich and detailed data, this study took a participatory research approach based on the epistemological position that young people's voices are an important source of knowledge. I worked with 12 young refugees from North Korea aged 17-27 who were current or recent students of three alternative schools established to support young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds. A visual method, Photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1997), and one-to-one interviews were used to listen to the young people's voices. The collected data was analysed by a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The overview of all the findings and discussion topics is presented in Figure 7.1. The young people's overall experiences of alternative school fell into four areas of life: education, future career, accommodation and well-being. This is the first topic of discussion in this chapter: 'functional aspects of integration'. From the findings of challenges and successes, two topics for discussion were extracted: 'social aspects of integration', and 'trauma and coping strategies'. As seen in Figure 7.1, 'teachers at alternative schools' is presented separately as the last topic for discussion. This is because this study had a significant amount of data on teachers and it is therefore worth discussing the topic in a separate section. These four topics will now be discussed.

Figure 7.1 Overview of themes and discussion topics of the study



Understandings of integration

As discussed in chapter 5, the study participants' experiences of alternative school fall into four main areas: education, future career planning, accommodation and physical and psychological well-being. The young people also viewed the school experiences as a process of preparation for their integration into South Korean society (see Figure 5.1); that is, their views on experiences of alternative school are related to 'integration' to a new society. To discuss the relevant findings, it is therefore necessary first to return to the young people's understandings of 'integration' derived from the findings.

Integration as a one-way process or a two-way process?

'Integration' is regarded as a core concept in a discussion on the rights, settlement and adjustment of refugees (Strang and Ager, 2010), and as a main aim of policies and actions for refugees (Ager and Strang, 2008). In spite of the importance of the topic in refugee studies, it seems to be difficult to reach an agreement on a definition of the term integration. Robinson (1998, cited in Sigona, 2005, p.118) explains integration as an 'individualised, contested and contextual' concept. Castles et al. (2002, p.13) also argue that 'there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated'. In Korea, it is widely found that the two terms integration and inclusion are used interchangeably, have a similar meaning, and are often translated as one word, *tong-hap* in Korean. Accordingly, the terms tend to be used synonymously in research on North Korean refugees. This study therefore suggests that further discussion on the use of the terms in North Korean refugee studies is needed.

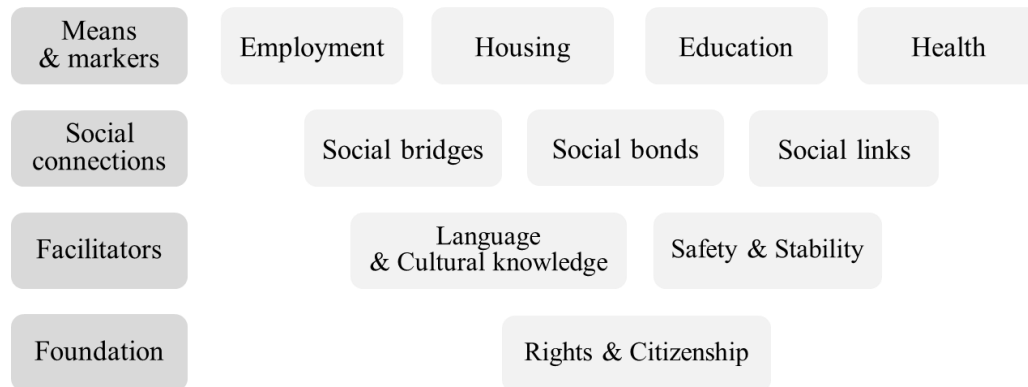
Nearly all participants (11 of 12) had a similar view of integration as a one-way process, which was similar to a process of assimilation, rather than mutual adjustment. They did not feel that South Koreans needed to make efforts to understand North Korean refugees and accept them into the society. Rather, the participants emphasised that they had a responsibility to adapt to South Korean

society, ‘learning to adapt themselves to the prevailing culture of the host society’ (Atfield et al., 2007, p.12). It was clearly revealed in the findings that the young people saw themselves as newcomers and a minority group. Only one participant had a concept of integration as a two-way process that ‘ensures new residents and existing residents adapt to one another’ (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007, p.9). This finding on the young people’s views of integration was unanticipated but important. I had not previously been familiar with the use of the term integration in this context because previous studies on North Korean refugees mostly used the term adjustment. However, participants in this study often mentioned the term *tong-hap* (meaning ‘integration’) rather than *jeok-eung* (meaning ‘adjustment’). Therefore, future research could usefully focus on the factors that lead the young people to view their integration into South Korean society as a one-way process. Notwithstanding the limitation, this finding may offer valuable insights for future research on young North Korean refugees’ integration.

Integration as a functional aspect and as a social aspect

To discuss young North Korean refugees’ experiences of alternative school in relation to integration, I employ the framework of refugee integration by Ager and Strang (2004; 2008) and its applied study, Atfield et al. (2007). As presented in chapter 5, the young refugees’ school experiences were categorised into four areas: education, future career, accommodation and well-being. These are consistent with the ‘markers and means’ of refugee integration, as suggested by Ager and Strang (2004; 2008). This also overlaps with Zetter et al.’s ‘functional aspects of integration’ (2002, cited in Atfield et al., 2007, p.13). Ager and Strang (2004) provide ten domains of indicators of refugee integration, grouping them into four levels, as seen in Figure 7.2. These means and markers correspond with Zetter et al.’s functional domain. The social connections and the foundation in the figure below are linked to the social domain and the legal and statutory domain respectively.

Figure 7.1 Indicators of integration framework (Ager and Strang, 2004)



The four domains at the level of means and markers of integration were explicitly identified in the findings about the young people’s experiences of alternative school, even though other indicators were also identified across the data of the study. Therefore, I will now go on to discuss the role of alternative schools in this functional domain of integration of young North Korean refugees.

As delineated earlier, the young people viewed their school experiences of the four areas as a process of ‘preparing for integration’. That is, when the young people mentioned ‘integration’, it appears that their understandings were mainly associated with social integration, and functional aspects of integration were regarded as preparation for social integration. This is supported by Atfield et al. (2007), one study on refugee’s perceptions of integration, with refugees in Haringey and Dudley, UK. The study argues that the achievement of functional integration is regarded as facilitating access to social aspects of integration. Ager and Strang (2004, p.3) also assert that achievement in the four domains is ‘an indication of positive integration outcomes’ (as markers) as well as ‘assist[ing] the wider integration process’ (as means). In this study, the participants also viewed their school experiences as a process of being equipped to live in South Korean society as ‘an independent citizen’. This finding is also associated with Crisp’s (2004) argument that refugees attain self-reliance by achieving the functional aspects of integration.

To summarise, the findings show that most participants have a viewpoint of integration as a one-way process, saying they needed to adapt themselves to South

Korean society rather than asking South Koreans to mutually adjust. The young people's understandings of integration were chiefly associated with social aspects of integration, and functional aspects of integration were viewed as a preparation for social integration. The next two sections, therefore, move on to discuss in more detail both aspects of integration, functional and social, on the basis of the findings of the young people's school experiences.

Functional aspects of integration

'School' and 'integration' have been key topics among researchers, educators and policy-makers for refugee children and young people. Much research has demonstrated that the school environment plays a key role in the successful integration of refugees (Bačáková, 2011; Matthews, 2008; Miller et al., 2018). For example, Correa-Velez et al. (2010) suggest that status at school, school performance, school support, bullying and peer attachment play a role as key predictors of well-being of resettled youth. However, most schools in previous studies were mainstream school settings consisting of students from various backgrounds, mostly including host-country students. On the other hand, South Korean alternative schools in the current study only offer support to young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds. Therefore, it is possible that differences in the role of school for young refugees' integration exist between my current study on alternative schools and previous research on mainstream schools.

As noted already, young North Korean refugees in this study experienced the functional aspects of integration in alternative school settings and these experiences were viewed as a process of preparation for social integration. Therefore, the next area of discussion addresses 'how' alternative schools help or hinder the young people's adjustment and integration into South Korean society.

My findings first show that alternative schools help young North Korean refugees' integration by providing appropriate education. As mentioned earlier, in South Korean society, where academic achievement is strongly emphasised, the most significant aspect of preparation for successful integration for young North Korean

refugees is a school certificate or acceptance to university. This is reflected in the participants' accounts of the reasons they chose alternative school: a) to improve their basic academic skills (for participants of school age), b) to have an opportunity to study in a school setting (for participants over school age, who had missed out on schooling), and c) to receive educational support (for participants without parents). This is partly consistent with one study (Park, 2012) which indicates four factors that lead young North Korean refugees to choose alternative schools: a) over school-going age, b) educational gaps with South Korean peers, c) hidden discrimination at general schools, and d) protection and support for unaccompanied refugees. While the hidden discrimination at general schools was not explicitly identified by participants in my findings as a direct reason to lead young people to transfer from general school to alternative school, some participants referred to it as a challenge that they had experienced at general schools. As with much previous research that addresses negative results due to disruption in schooling in North Korea and transit countries, this study also confirms a lack of basic academic skills of North Korean refugee students, educational gaps with South Korean peers, and discrepancy between chronological age and school age. These issues of education are also reported in existing literature about young refugees in other countries (Block et al., 2014; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018).

In addition, the findings of the current study indicate that financial issues and the competitive climate of South Korean high schools are challenging aspects of schooling at general school. North Korean refugee students receive financial support in general school settings, such as tuition exemption and free text books. They are, however, still highly likely to have the burden of paying for additional private lessons after school. As of 2017, figures indicate that 70.5% of South Korean students take additional private lessons and parents also have the burden of the high costs of private education. In particular, 55.0% of high school students participate in private education, and they spend on average 515,000 KRW per month (around 345 GBP) for it (Statistics Korea, 2018). However, it can be difficult for students from North Korean refugee backgrounds to be sufficiently supported by parents due to their unstable job status and economic difficulties (Kang et al., 2017). The very competitive environment of high school, chiefly focused on exam preparation, also

contributes to the difficulty young people experience at general school. This is supported by a statistical report which shows that the school dropout rate of North Korean refugee students from general high school (6.1%) is higher than that of elementary school (0.6%) and middle school (2.3%) (Ministry of Education, 2017), as noted earlier in chapter 5.

Due to these disadvantages, young North Korean refugees are highly likely to be marginalised and in a vulnerable situation in general school settings. Also, some older students are not eligible for proper support by the state if they are over 24 years old (see Table 2.3). The findings of this study show that it can be difficult for young North Korean refugees to overcome the challenging situations at an individual level within the current school climate of South Korean general secondary education. In addition, a class structure divided by age and a strict senior-junior relationship influenced by the Confucianism culture are often seen to make it difficult for students over school age to adjust to general school settings (Kim, 2014; Lee, 2007; Lee et al., 2011). In this context, my findings suggest that alternative school can be a good alternative that helps young North Korean refugees to continue with their study and thereby lay a foundation for their successful integration into South Korean society.

This view is strongly supported by all the participants who had previous experiences of mainstream schools. They emphasised that support for learning at alternative schools, such as teaching approaches and class materials considering the young people's level and free additional lessons after school, helped them make up classes and further improve their academic skills. Although there are several support programmes offered by the state (e.g. one-to-one mentoring or special units for North Korean refugee students) with the purpose of helping North Korean refugee students in general school settings (Kim et al., 2015), in the light of the accounts of participants who had experienced general school earlier, it seems to be difficult for general school teachers to focus on individuals and consider their learning ability and speed in the current school environment. There are currently few existing studies which explore North Korean refugee students' views of the relevant support policies and programmes in general school settings, even among researchers who argue for

the necessity and importance of inclusive education for North Korean refugee students. Further studies, with more focus on the students' voices on the state-offered support at general schools, are therefore important.

Alongside educational support, findings in this current study also highlighted the ways in which alternative schools offered other kinds of support for accommodation, future career planning, and physical and psychological well-being. This holistic, caring approach, aiming for 'the welfare, well-being and fullest development of the individual' (Best et al., 2000, p.15), contrast with South Korean general schools, which principally focus on students' academic development. This holistic approach by schools for young refugees has also emerged in Western countries (Hek, 2005; Pugh et al., 2012; Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). For example, the School Support Programme in Victoria, Australia, provides a holistic model encompassing the learning, social and emotional needs of students from refugee backgrounds (Block et al., 2014). The present study, however, suggests that South Korean alternative schools more comprehensively address young refugees' needs by considering their past, present and future lives. This study also calls for South Korean general schools to recognise the worth of this kind of holistic model and to put it into practice more widely.

From a functional integration viewpoint, and based on these findings, I would argue that alternative schools contribute to promoting young North Korean refugees' integration into South Korean society, with a holistic approach encompassing a numerous aspects of young refugees' lives. However, such a contribution has not been examined in depth so far. Rather, the role of alternative school has tended to be somewhat under-represented in debates on the necessity of inclusive education. As previously noted, some researchers stress the importance of inclusive education in which students from the two Koreas study together in a classroom (Maeng and Gil, 2013; Oh, 2015). However, the findings of this study show that separate education for a certain period should not be ignored as a means of providing better integration, taking into account the young people's special needs in social, academic, physical and psychological domains.

Here, it would be worth noting that alternative schools could be ‘a double edged sword’ for young refugees’ integration. That is, alternative schools could offer a comfortable space for students to share their experiences with others from the same backgrounds. The school climate also tends to be a family-like atmosphere in which students are more likely to receive individualised attention and establish a close relationship with school teachers. These experiences of alternative school can help ameliorate troubling situations for young North Korean refugees, and can promote resilience and thereby contribute to the young people’s integration. At the same time, these kinds of advantages may be seen as disadvantages, in that they hinder the young people from mingling with South Korean peers and forming an identity as an ordinary young person like other South Koreans. This is discussed below.

From functional integration to social integration

In addition to the functional integration that has been discussed so far, the findings also have much to offer in terms of how we might understand social aspects of integration for young refugees. Atfield et al. (2007) elucidate this, citing Zetter et al. (2002, p.139):

The social domain is concerned with more informal processes of integration, such as participation in social networks, the acquisition of social capital, and the sense of identity or belonging within the host society. The concept of social integration indicates also, as Zetter et al. put it, the extent to which: ‘refugees are active participants in the receiving societies’.

While the findings in chapter 5 largely focused on the young North Korean refugees’ functional aspects of integration, the findings presented in chapter 6, which discuss participants’ challenges and successes in alternative school settings, are mainly related to social aspects of integration; ‘participation in social networks’, ‘acquisition of social capital’, and a ‘sense of identity or belonging’ within South Korean society, as in the above quotation from Zetter et al. (2002).

Social aspects of integration

Previous studies which adopt a framework of the acquisition of social capital in order to discuss social aspects of refugee integration also proved useful in this study in helping to interpret the findings (Atfield et al., 2007; Boateng, 2010; Elliott and Yusuf, 2014; Naidoo, 2009). These studies place an emphasis on social relationships (or networks) in assessing refugees' social integration. Ager and Strang (2004) also suggest social bonds, bridges, and links as social connections, drawing on the theory of Putnam (1993; 1995). Atfield et al. (2007, p.11) characterise the bonding social capital as 'thick' social ties, which help groups 'get by' but may leave groups in isolation, while the bridging social capital is viewed as 'one key indicator of a cohesive, integrated society', helping groups 'get ahead' as 'thinner' social ties. The notion of linking social capital access to services is offered at institutional levels, such as local or central government. Drawing on some aspects of discussions of social capital, the challenges and successes that the 12 participants experienced in alternative school settings are discussed below, focusing on the acquisition of social capital in South Korean society.

Social bonds

The study findings suggest that the 12 young North Korean refugees acquired bonding social capital in alternative school settings because the three alternative schools of the study consisted entirely of students from North Korean refugee backgrounds. This is a distinctive difference from most prior research in which school is described as a place to form social networks with other students from the host country (Naidoo, 2009). This study, therefore, suggests that South Korean alternative schools play a role as a kind of community association, beyond an institution of education, where social bonds among young North Korean refugees are reinforced.

According to the accounts by the participants, these social bonds helped the young people's social integration in some significant ways. They felt stable emotionally, with a sense of belonging to school, and also shared not only similar experiences

from North Korea and their migration journeys but also shared experiences of adversity during their settlement in South Korean society. This is consistent with earlier research which discusses the role of social bonds among refugees (Deuchar, 2011; Marlowe, 2011; Pittaway et al., 2009). For example, research undertaken by Elliott and Yusuf (2014), with eight Somali refugees in New Zealand, confirms the important relation between having social bonds and feelings of well-being in the host society. Making relationships with other refugees plays a role as a foundation for settlement in a new society. Another study with 22 young refugees from seven countries in Glasgow (Deuchar, 2011) also reports that young refugees felt ‘camaraderie’ by meeting other young people with similar backgrounds, and had a sense of isolation due to the lack of those opportunities at an early stage of settlement. Hek (2005) also suggests that it is necessary for young refugees to have friendships with others from their home country at the beginning stage of settlement. It is therefore supported by the prior research that strong social bonds with other young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds in alternative school settings are helpful for their initial settlement.

According to the findings of this study, as presented in chapter 6, the young people experienced successes and challenges while developing social bonds at alternative schools. They regarded it as a successful experience that they had a sense of belonging to school or participated in a meaningful role within school. On the other hand, they were concerned about their future integration after graduation due to a lack of social networks with South Korean peers. They also felt challenged by the fact that alternative schools are labelled as a specialised school for young North Korean refugees. While they felt at home in this kind of school environment, they also felt isolated from the mainstream society, as their social ties were getting stronger. This supports an argument that ‘dense social relations in migrant groups’ give rise to ‘increased segregation’ (Spoonley et al., 2005, p.96).

This study was not able to examine whether the relationships with members of the same school would be continued after their graduation and how the social bonds play a role after their graduation. It would be worth investigating how the bonded social capital goes on in future research.

Social bridging

According to Ager and Strang (2008), social bridges are formed by building friendly neighbourhood relationships and contribute to refugees' feelings of settlement and usefulness in society. As reported above, school or other education sites are, in the main, regarded as a place for building social bridges for young refugees (Harris and Young, 2010). A qualitative study of 15 young refugees' perspectives on the role of education for settlement in the UK indicates that friendships with non-refugee young people in mainstream school settings help young refugees gain a sense of belonging (Hek, 2005). In this sense, alternative schools, as a homogenous group, are likely to hinder young North Korean refugees from bridging social capital with other South Korean peers and thereby promoting their social integration into society.

Most participants felt it difficult to build social networks with South Korean peers within the current environment at alternative schools, which consisted of students from North Korean refugee backgrounds. In particular, as indicated in chapter 6, young North Korean refugees involved in alternative schools tended to spend the most time with others from similar backgrounds at the same school and the same house during the weekdays, and even, for some of them, at the same church during the weekend. While Allen (2010) notes that Christian refugees are more likely to have opportunities to build social bridges than Muslim refugees, Christian participants in my study attended a special church or worship organised for North Korean refugees. In light of this, it seems difficult for the young people to naturally make social networks with South Koreans in the current context of alternative schools. On the other hand, North Korean refugee students in general school settings are more likely to have the opportunities to build friendly relationships with South Korean peers. In this sense, it would seem that alternative schools are somewhat disadvantageous for North Korean young refugees' acquisition of social bridges, while general schools can play a role as a resource of bridging social capital. This has also been a main argument of previous research which emphasises the necessity of inclusive education (Maeng and Gil, 2013; Oh, 2015). However, here it needs to be taken into consideration that, in general school settings, there are, on average, one to two students from North Korean refugee backgrounds in a class or even in a

school (Kim et al., 2015). Accordingly, it is likely that North Korean refugee students have difficulty in becoming integrated socially into the existing group of South Korean students.

In addition, prior research reports that North Korean refugee students tend to feel stressed about revealing their origins and identity as a North Korean refugee to South Korean peers, and tend to conceal them to avoid discriminatory and negative views towards them (Kim et al., 2015; Maeng and Gil, 2013). Lee (2012) points out that fear of being discriminated against and becoming outcasts due to their North Korean origin and its local accent hinders young North Korean refugees from making peer relations at school. Similarly, Atfield et al. (2007, p.43) indicate that ‘The social networks they formed in schools were limited by fears that their status ostracised them from their peers due to the negative publicity and connotations linked to the words ‘asylum’ and ‘refugee’’. Although the study participants can temporarily avoid the challenging situation by enrolling at alternative school, they still worried whether they would be accepted by South Korean students on entering a university and if they would be excluded for the sole reason that they were from North Korea.

Nevertheless, the young people emphasised the necessity of meeting and mingling with South Korean peers to promote social integration, although some difficulties were anticipated in this process. The difficulties that young North Korean refugees may face should not be underestimated. In light of the findings, however, this study suggests a need to focus on the young people’s desire and willingness to overcome the difficulties and build social bridges with South Koreans. In particular, some participants felt success and usefulness when they played a meaningful role in a community by participating in voluntary work. This kind of social participation would be a good example as young North Korean refugees can improve social bridges with South Koreans in a natural setting, but also fulfil their emotional needs by having a positive feeling of themselves as a useful and valuable person in society. Despite the importance of social bridging which emerged in this study, only a few participants experienced this kind of social participation; young North Korean refugees in alternative school settings had very limited opportunities to make

friendships with South Korean peers in a natural setting or to participate in community work.

This study has only one participant who reported his experience of having a significant relationship with a South Korean mentor. This is the same person who had a view of integration as a two-way process and stressed mutual adjustment between the two Koreas. This study did not investigate how the mentor directly influenced his view of integration, although he reported some positive changes in his emotions and improvement in his knowledge of South Korean society. I, however, speculate that the mentorship with a South Korean could broaden his view of integration in light of one study about a mentoring project for North Korean refugee university students (Yang, 2011), in which both South Korean mentors and North Korean refugee mentees improve their mutual understanding. In addition to this advantage of mentorship with South Koreans, the absence of a significant person was reported as a challenge in this study. Therefore, it needs to be considered as a priority goal in education sectors that young North Korean refugees have South Korean mentors who influence these young people significantly. The role of mentors is discussed again in relation to young refugees' resilience in the following section.

Although this study found the existence of social capital, the quality of the relationships was not investigated in detail. This is a limitation of the study. For future research, I suggest that it would be useful to explore the quality of young refugees' relationships in alternative education settings, in order to properly assess the social capital of North Korean refugee young people. Spellerberg (2001) argues that assessing social capital relies not only on the existence of relationships but on the quality of those relationships, which can only be assessed in context.

Social links

As mentioned above, social links are related to individuals' access to institutional levels, including local and central government services (Ager and Strang, 2008). In this study, young North Korean refugees tended to access social services offered at an institutional level and receive the relevant information through their school

teachers. Compared to North Korean refugee students enrolled in general schools, the young people of the study were more likely to achieve social links easily with their teachers' help. On the other hand, there was a difference in the level of acquisition of social links among individual students within the schools, depending largely on the teachers' decisions. Due to this mechanism of acquisition of social links at alternative schools, alternative school teachers tended to have a relatively strong influence on their refugee students, and this was occasionally felt as a challenge by some participants. This is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Ordinariness – beyond integration

So far, I have discussed my findings of the study in the context of refugee integration and alternative schools, drawing on a framework for refugee integration by Ager and Strang (2004) and Atfield et al. (2007). In brief, young North Korean refugees' experiences of alternative schools are categorised into four areas of life: education, future career, accommodation and well-being. The participants viewed these experiences as a process of becoming integrated into the new society of South Korea. The four areas, as functional aspects of integration, play a role as markers and means of refugee integration (Ager and Strang, 2004; Atfield et al., 2007), and this study argues that alternative schools help young North Korean refugees become integrated into South Korean society by providing functional aspects of integration.

The present study also argues that alternative school have both advantages and disadvantages regarding aspects of social integration. Young refugees from North Korea in this study felt less satisfied that they had limited opportunities to mingle with South Korean peers, even though alternative schools play a positive role in strengthening social bonds among students from similar backgrounds. In terms of social links, alternative school students accessed social services and information offered by the institutions relatively easily, compared to students at general school, but some limitations still existed in regards to the social links being mainly established by school teachers.

While the two studies above (Ager and Strang, 2004; Atfield et al., 2007), carried out in Western societies, suggest that refugees can feel integrated and equal by achieving citizenship of the host country, young North Korean refugees in this study did not seem to feel integrated or equal enough, even though they had already obtained South Korean citizenship. The young people still felt discriminated against and faced hidden barriers to becoming integrated into mainstream society. In other words, it would seem that they did not feel fully integrated although they had become functionally, legally and even socially integrated. Going beyond integration, they were strongly eager to live as ordinary persons in society, like normal South Koreans. That is, although young North Korean refugees can obtain South Korean citizenship relatively easily, compared to refugees from other countries, citizenship itself was clearly not enough.

Here, the findings suggest that seeking ordinariness does not mean abandoning their origin or identity as a North Korean. In this study, the participants tended to have a dual position about where they were from. While the young people sought ordinariness, hiding their identity as a North Korean, they valued at the same time their origins in North Korea and were willing to receive social benefits that they were entitled to because they were North Korean refugees. Some were also thinking about how they could use their prior experiences in North Korea and during their migration for their future careers. This is supported by Kim et al. (2015) who suggest that these young people tend to embrace both sides of identity, being South Korean or North Korean, with a view of this dual position as a resource, rather than having to choose only one identity. As the two Koreas share a common ethnicity and culture, it is relatively easily for those young people to possibly hide their identity as a North Korean refugee, compared to refugees from other ethnic backgrounds. In terms of national identity, opposing views are found in previous studies. One study reports that four of nine young North Korean refugees viewed themselves as entirely North Koreans and three had dual identities of the two Koreas, but no young refugees perceived themselves as entirely South Koreans (Choi and Cho, 2010). On the other hand, another study reports that some are willing to recognise their national identity as South Koreans (Park and Oh, 2011). The current study was not set up to explore

the issue of identity. Therefore, how alternative schools affect young North Korean refugees to form their identity in a new society was not explicitly investigated.

It is, however, clear that young North Korean refugees still face hidden barriers, such as bias and discriminatory views in South Korean society. On the basis of the findings, I would suggest that alternative schools need to take some action to change South Koreans' views toward North Korean refugees and improve mutual understanding, for example, by increasing social exchanges among young people from the two Koreas. In other words, alternative schools could play a role as a 'bridge' between young people from the two Koreas. By doing so, it is expected that alternative schools can help young North Korean refugees establish social relationships with South Koreans and thereby help them form a positive identity of themselves as ordinary citizens in South Korean society, as previous research argues that young refugees' identity is influenced by interpersonal relationships (Choi and Cho, 2010; Ndengeyingoma et al., 2014).

In addition, I would also suggest mainstream schools work together with alternative schools. To my knowledge, no outcomes of research and policy on co-operation between alternative schools and mainstream schools have been conducted thus far. However, to practice better education for North Korean refugee students, it would be necessary to exchange useful information and appropriate approaches to education and take care of those students with special needs as refugees. This also contributes to improving South Korean students' views on students from North Korean refugee backgrounds and thereby to develop positive relations between young people from the two Koreas.

Additionally, some in the current study indicated that the media tend to strengthen negative views toward refugees from North Korea. In the light of an argument that media also affect the formation of refugees' national identity and belonging (Khan, 2013), I would call for the South Korean media to address young North Korean refugees as normal citizens, rather than emphasising their adversities and vulnerabilities.

Trauma and coping strategies

The issues of trauma have had much attention from researchers in existing studies on young refugees from North Korea (e.g. Kim 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2015; Son et al., 2010), but also from other countries (e.g. Goodman, 2004; Halcón et al., 2004; Mohamed and Thomas, 2017; Rossiter and Rossiter, 2009). The current study, in common with a great deal of prior research on the trauma of young refugees, found significant impacts of trauma on young North Korean refugees and the strategies that the young people used to cope with the adversities that they faced. Therefore, it is worth discussing the relations in young refugees' trauma, integration, and schooling on the basis of the findings of the study.

In terms of the issues of trauma, this study first confirms the necessity of considering the complexity inherent in young North Korean refugees' trauma. The participants of the study reported a host of experiences of mental and physical trauma in migration, as well as in pre-migration. The findings show that the traumatic experiences still affect the young people's current life but are also linked to concerns about their future. In other words, the young refugees' trauma needs to be addressed in a way in which there can be an inter-connection of the past, present and future of their lives, not fragmentarily. It is also found that trauma widely affected the young people's internal and external life. Howe et al. (1999, p.4) also note this 'complex interplay between the past and the present, the psychological inside and the social outside in reference to psychological well-being.

The role of the school in promoting appropriate support for refugee-background students with trauma has attained much attention in previous studies (e.g. Block et al., 2014; Ehntholt et al., 2005; Quinlan et al., 2016; Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). The young people in this study also acquired resources in alternative school settings to encourage resilience. For example, they could easily access counselling programmes and other therapy programmes offered by the schools. It was found that these programmes helped the young people improve their physical and psychological well-being by recovering from trauma. Of course, here, we should be careful not to generalise the positive role of alternative schools on young North Korean refugees'

trauma, because this study also had some participants who showed negative views of the caring approach of the schools.

Although the importance of the role of school is noted in all the studies on young refugees, including my current study, there is a distinct difference in this study as the schools utilised in this research are specialised only for young North Korean refugees, while the prior research deals with mainstream school settings. As alternative schools consisted of students from similar backgrounds, as North Korean refugees, they could share their adversities and empathise with each other more easily. Conversely, the young people were more likely to easily hurt each other because they knew the 'Achilles heel' well, and friendships were also influenced by individuals' trauma. Nevertheless, it is clear that the strong bonds among young North Korean refugees formed in alternative school settings help the young people alleviate the effects of trauma. Kohli and Mather (2003) suggest that belonging to somewhere or someone helps promote the psychological well-being of young refugees. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) also proposes that 'peer support' and 'mutual self-help' among individuals with similar experiences of trauma play a key role in helping people heal and recover from trauma. This is supported by the findings from the current study, as a greater sense of belonging to alternative schools and a closer relationship among refugee students played a role as protective factors, compared to general school settings.

According to one study on Iraq migrants in Sweden (Lecroft et al., 2016), horizontal social capital, including both bonds and bridges, could be a way of promoting resilience. Social participation and trust in others could protect individuals against poor mental health caused by social factors. In this sense, South Korean alternative schools seem to be insufficient in promoting young North Korean refugees' resilience because the young people are likely to experience limited social connections within the schools, as they are restricted to those established amongst mostly school teachers or with others from similar backgrounds. Therefore, it would seem that there is a necessity for alternative schools to develop further ways for North Korean refugee students to make more social bridges with South Koreans.

It is also interesting to note that most participants, though not all, tried to develop their own strategies to cope with adversities and recover from the impact of diverse traumatic experiences. In my view, this can be one of the key findings that show how the young people understand and experience their challenges and successes. The young people experienced multi-layered difficulties in North Korea and other transit countries. However, they did not remain in the past. Rather, they tried to add some meaning onto their past experiences, and not to regret the journey of their past lives. They also tried to overcome the difficulties in a positive way, viewing all adversities that they had experienced in the past and are facing at present as part of a journey towards a better future. The young people understood healing from trauma as a process of settlement in South Korean society and had a positive feeling from the process of overcoming these difficult situations in their own ways. Similarly, Kohli and Mather (2003) found that unaccompanied refugees made a balance of their vulnerabilities and resilience as part of the process of settlement. The constructive responses to adversities shown by young North Korean refugees in my study are also supported by other prior studies emphasising young refugees' resilience and positive development (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Hek, 2005; Hughes and Beirens, 2007; Matthews, 2008; Morland, 2007). This study, therefore, calls for a shift in the focus on young North Korean refugees from their deficiencies and weaknesses to their potential and strength, with a balance of vulnerabilities and resilience.

In contrast to previous research, which emphasises the necessity of mentors as a supportive relationship for young refugees, the experience of having a mentor was reported by only one participant in this study, as already mentioned. Cole and Blythe (2010, p.151) propose that a mentoring model, as a 'culturally-acceptable form of psychosocial assistance', could be an alternative to traditional mental health services. Mentors play a role in enhancing young people's resilience (Gilligan, 1999), and successful young immigrants had a mentor 'who took a youngster under his or her wing' (Gaytán et al., 2007, p.13). In light of this, it seems unfortunate that very few students received the benefits of a mentoring relationship in the current study. Instead, teachers were covering a wide range of roles, including mentoring in alternative school settings, as presented in chapter 5.

As previously noted, the young refugee participants viewed their recovery from trauma as a process of preparing themselves to become integrated into South Korean society. Therefore, in order to examine how alternative schools help or hinder young North Korean refugees' integration into South Korean society, it is necessary to identify how alternative schools practise trauma-informed approaches. The findings of the study show that the schools provided a range of programmes designed for supporting young North Korean refugees with traumatic experiences and teachers at alternative schools were also committed to helping these refugee students impacted by trauma. Compared to general school settings, it seems clear that administrations of alternative schools are better informed and have more experience with students from North Korean refugee backgrounds. All the head teachers whom I met for the current study had prior experiences as educators, activists, or advocates for North Korean refugees, at least for more than ten years. Taking into consideration the importance of school administration in the Trauma-informed school model (Wiest-Stevenson and Lee, 2016), it seems clear that South Korean alternative schools have advantages in practising trauma-informed approaches. At the same time, to support young refugees better, this study would recommend that teachers at alternative schools need to be trained and informed more about how to react to trauma and appropriately assist those impacted by trauma. In this study, while teachers were identified as persons who help and support young North Korean refugees through a wide range of roles, as described earlier, there was a female student who had a challenging experience in relation to a male teacher's approach in managing her behaviour and poor emotional control. Despite the necessity of professional development of teachers at alternative schools, it is hard to find existing outcomes of research and policy on initial education or continuing professional development for teachers in alternative education settings. The issues of teachers at alternative schools are further discussed below.

Teachers at alternative schools

As discussed thus far, the findings of the study suggest that alternative schools of the current study practise a holistic approach for young North Korean refugees, and aim to fulfil the young people's special needs and help them achieve successful

integration into South Korean society. This study also found that teachers were central to the holistic approach and played a key role in the young people's schooling, but also in more general aspects of the students' lives. In addition, teachers were often the only South Korean persons with whom young North Korean refugees kept a close relationship, meeting regularly. This study therefore suggests that young North Korean refugees are probably dependent on school teachers in many ways and teachers are more likely to have a strong influence on the students. On the basis of the findings of the study, this section goes on to discuss the role of teachers and the student-teacher relationship at alternative schools for young North Korean refugees.

As described in chapter 5, teachers in this study were viewed as experts in teaching, helping, guiding, and instructing young refugees from North Korea. The findings also highlight that the young people developed knowledge and an understanding of South Korean society with the help of teachers. In particular, the young people at the early stage of settlement had a relatively high level of dependency on their teachers. They often faced a bewildering set of circumstances at the initial stage of adjustment and they were hurt or became less confident easily when they made mistakes or experienced misunderstandings. In this context, teachers helped the young people overcome difficulties and improve their understanding of South Korean society. In light of this, I would suggest that the period or stage of settlement needs to be considered as an important factor that may influence young refugees to value the role of teachers at alternative schools.

The strong influence of alternative school teachers on young North Korean refugees may be understood in line with the young people's vulnerable situations associated with parents. The findings reveal the difficult family situations for many young people, with some not being able to live with their family at all. Kim et al. (2015) note that around 50% of young North Korean refugees are in vulnerable situations, which means that they are unable receive appropriate support from their parents. They may be living in a single-parent family (44.3%), or are being raised by a grandmother or grandfather (0.9%), or living alone without their parents (0.9%). Even though some participants had both parents, it was hard for parents to be involved in their children's schooling, due to having to work late or living separately

in a remote city to earn money, as noted earlier. Under these circumstances, teachers are more likely to take the role of care, in the place of parents. This study argues that teachers at alternative schools for young North Korean refugees play more roles, not limited within a classroom, influencing overall areas of refugee students' lives, and also that these wide range of roles of the teachers should be valued in appropriate ways.

The current study also suggests that the close and positive relationships between teachers and students can be another strength of alternative schools for young North Korean refugees. As noted earlier, alternative schools of the study tended to be more informal, compared to general schools (see chapter 6). Although this informality of alternative schools was seen negatively by some younger students in the study, for example, because they didn't have school uniforms and having less strict regulation, it was also found that teacher-student relationships were much closer at alternative schools than at general schools. Most participants, though not all, reported that teachers at the schools tended to use friendly approaches based on the close teacher-student relationships when the teachers responded to disruptive students. I therefore suggest that there may be a difference in the quality of a teacher-student relationship, depending on the type of school. However, little research focusing on the teacher-student relationship has been carried out so far and, therefore, this offers another avenue for further research in future. While the wide range of teachers' roles and the friendly approaches were viewed positively by the young people in this study, one research finding argues that this may lead to burnout of teachers working in alternative schools (Yoon, 2015).

This study clearly shows that young North Korean refugees maintained a close relationship with their teachers, but not all students did. Some viewed the role and influence of teachers on the basis of 'a structural relationship' (Raven, 1999, p.166), rather than an interpersonal relationship. While they admitted that their teachers were kind, had warm attitudes and made friendly efforts for students, their views still focused on the assigned role and position of the teacher, chiefly associated with academic work within a classroom. This study, therefore, suggests that the length of school enrolment may influence North Korean refugee students' views of the role of

and relationship with teachers. As mentioned already, some female participants experienced the authoritarian attitude of their teachers and these were associated with male teachers. It would seem that gender impact exists in teacher influence. As each of the two findings above was extracted from only a small number of participants respectively, it may be difficult to generalise the findings here. Nevertheless, this study suggests that the length of enrolment in the schools or the stage of adjustment to South Korean society may influence North Korean refugee students' views of the role of and relationship with school teachers, and also the refugee students may be influenced by teachers differently according to gender. This would be an interesting topic for future research.

As has been seen thus far, there are clear differences in the role of and the relationships with teachers between students at alternative schools and at general schools. Alongside this, a teacher's religion was often mentioned by the young refugee participants. This is understood in a context where most South Korean alternative schools are established on a foundation of a religion, especially Christianity, and those schools also prefer Christian teachers when they employ teachers (Park, 2012). In light of the findings of this current study and the prior research, I would speculate that the management system of alternative schools, largely relying on a teacher's religious commitment, may lead to neglecting the structural problems, which lead to teachers suffering burnout and being less influential in some contexts, even though religion can be an internal motivating force that leads teachers at alternative schools to be committed to students from North Korean refugee backgrounds. This may not be directly linked to the questions of the current study. However, it is important to identify the factors that may have a negative influence on the role of teachers and the student-teacher relationship because a large part of the role of alternative schools for the integration of young North Korean refugees are linked to the role of teachers at alternative schools.

In particular, teachers were viewed as less influential by the refugee students in the context where teachers managed a problem occurring between students and other individual sponsors or volunteers. Currently, most alternative schools are operated by financial assistance, largely from local NGOs, individual sponsors or local religious

institutions. The government subsidies cover only around 20% of the whole school budget (Park, 2011). To put it another way, most of the school budget depends on financial aid by external resources. Under this financial structure, there is likely to be a hierarchical power structure between the giver and the receiver. In addition, the findings show that the social position of alternative school teachers is more likely to be shaped by the low wages and unstable employment status, where they are not regarded as civil servants, like general school teachers. The young people in this study also indicated that teachers changed frequently at alternative schools because they might have difficulty in taking long-term work, due to the poor and unstable conditions and their exhaustion. This is supported by Yoon (2015), who argues that a number of teachers tend to leave alternative schools within three years because of physical and mental burnout and financial issues. Clearly, teacher exhaustion is likely to affect the quality of education and teacher-student relationships. As an example in the current study, some tended to be reluctant or hesitant to talk to teachers about their private concerns or something rooted in their minds, because they did not want to add extra work to their teachers. On the other hand, there was a positive view of teachers' sacrifices in spite of the poor working conditions. The young people felt grateful for the teachers' hard work for them, not underestimating it. This understanding of teachers may contain a possibility of developing a new type of student-teacher relationship, as co-workers or collaborators who construct education together, beyond a relationship between givers and receivers or a relationship between subordinates and superiors. This study would suggest that South Korean teachers work collaboratively with students from North Korean refugee backgrounds, beyond a one-way relationship providing help and support for students in need.

In light of the significance of the role of the teacher in alternative school settings, as identified in the study, I urgently call for improvements in the ways teachers are treated at alternative schools for young North Korean refugees. To date, little attention has been paid to the role of the teacher or to their voices. I therefore recommend that future research and policy making is carried out, concerning the workload and working environments of teachers at alternative schools, including the implementation of policies and programmes for further professional development of

the teachers, as mentioned above, for better practice in education for young North Korean refugees.

Summary

This discussion started with a review of the study thus far, briefly summarising the research aims, methods and data analysis. I then extracted four main topics for discussion on the basis of key findings. The main discussion began with young North Korean refugees' understandings of integration. Most participants understood integration as a one-way process, putting the responsibilities to adjust on themselves, rather than a two-way process on the basis of mutual understanding.

The role of alternative schools in the integration of young North Korean refugees was then discussed in two parts: functional and social aspects of integration. From the viewpoint of functional integration, this study argues that alternative schools help young North Korean refugees become integrated into South Korean society by providing a holistic caring approach which covers four areas of life: education, future career, accommodation and well-being. In terms of social integration, it is suggested that alternative schools have both advantages and disadvantages in light of the work of Ager and Strang (2004) and Atfield et al. (2007). I then drew on the previous work of social bonds of young refugees (e.g. Elliott and Yusuf, 2014) to argue that alternative schools play a positive role in strengthening social bonds among young people from North Korean refugee backgrounds. I also discussed the ways in which young North Korean refugees have difficulty in social building with South Koreans. The young people's desire to be ordinary in South Korean society was also discussed in this chapter.

Echoing the findings of previous research, trauma and resilience emerged as two of the main issues for young North Korean refugees in the current study. My findings strongly suggest that the impact of diverse traumatic experiences on the young people should not be underestimated and should be dealt with in an appropriate time and way. At the same time, this study also suggests that young North Korean

refugees need to be recognised as social actors with agency in coping with their trauma with their own strategies.

In my study, teachers were found to play a significant role in influencing the young people's schooling and also their day-to-day living. The roles teachers at alternative schools play cover a wide range beyond teaching, such as parent, guide, counsellor and friend. In this context, I suggest that alternative school teachers are likely to have a strong influence on North Korean refugee students on the basis of the students' dependency. This study, at the same time, calls for the improvement of school systems and working conditions that may lead alternative school teachers to be less influential on students.

In the final chapter, I will set out the main findings and discussions in relation to each of the research questions, and the original contribution to current knowledge, along with recommendations for future research provided by this study.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Introduction

This study has explored 12 young North Korean refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools, focusing on how they understand and experience challenges and successes in alternative school settings. To do this, it utilised a visual method, Photovoice, and one-to-one interviews. By doing so, this study has sought to answer the question of how alternative schools help or hinder the young refugees' integration into South Korean society. Although this study was small-scale, it has produced valuable findings and raised significant new questions about the role of alternative schools in young North Korean refugees' adaptation but also education for young refugees more widely. In this chapter these are summarised and articulated to conclude the thesis.

Summary of key findings and discussions

The main goal of the current study was to examine the role of alternative schools for young North Korean refugees' integration into South Korean society, by exploring the young people's challenges and successes in alternative school settings. This study has been guided by four research questions: a) What are young North Korean refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools?, b) How do they understand and experience challenges in their school settings?, c) How do they understand and experience successes in their school settings?, and d) How does alternative school help or hinder their integration into South Korean society? This section summarises the key findings and discussions in relation to each of the research questions.

The first question of the study concerns young North Korean refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools. The findings of the question are presented in chapter 5. The young refugees' experiences of alternative schools were categorised into four areas: education, future career planning, accommodation and physical and psychological well-being. These are consistent with the means and markers of refugee integration, as suggested by Ager and Strang (2004; 2008), and are also

regarded as the functional aspects of integration (Atfield et al., 2007). The young people understood the experiences of the four areas as a process of preparing themselves to become integrated into South Korean society. Whilst only one viewed 'integration' as a two-way process, all had a similar view of integration as a one-way process. Their views of integration were also, on the whole, related to social integration and they therefore regarded these functional aspects of integration as a preparatory stage for social integration.

Three alternative schools which participated in the study provided appropriate education for the young refugees to develop academic ability but also social understanding of South Korean society. The young people saw their experiences of education offered by the schools as helpful in achieving successful integration. The young people also experienced a holistic caring approach concerning accommodation, preparation for future careers, and physical and psychological well-being, in contrast to general schools, which principally focus on students' academic development. The young people valued the holistic caring approach by the alternative schools that helped them overcome the difficulties that they had faced in the past, as well as those they were facing in the present as they prepared themselves to be independent citizens. However, some negative sides of the school programmes were also reported in this study. The young refugees had a balanced view of the advantages and disadvantages of alternative schools. These benefits and drawbacks were often mentioned in particular among participants who had had earlier experiences of mainstream schools before enrolling in alternative schools. In the current study, teachers at alternative schools were seen as having a key role in influencing these young people's schooling but also more general aspects of their lives.

The second and third questions of the research deal with how the young people understand and experience challenges and successes in alternative school settings. This was addressed in chapter 6. During the research, I sought to identify how the young people perceived 'challenge' and 'success', while not providing any definition of the terms at the start of the project. As I mentioned, my initial views of time and space within the research topic were limited to 'within a school' and 'at present' when I formulated the research questions about challenges and successes that young

refugees experience in school settings. The challenges and successes were, however, intertwined with the young people's past, present and future, experienced inside and outside school. These were largely related to social and emotional areas of needs.

The findings on the social domain were discussed based on the theory of social capital by Putnam (1993; 1995): social bonds, bridges and links, which are regarded as social aspects of integration (Atfield et al., 2007). The young refugees acquired and strengthened bonding social capital in alternative school settings because the schools were composed of students from North Korean refugee backgrounds. They formed close relationships with each other and had a great sense of belonging to their school. These were viewed as helpful for the young people's integration, according to the findings of the current study, but also for other young refugees in the light of previous research. The close relationships with teachers and their friendly approaches also played a positive role in the young refugees' adjustment.

At the same time, the young people felt challenged in making social connections with South Koreans in their current environment of alternative schools. While the strong sense of belonging to school and bonds among North Korean refugee students were viewed as positive and helpful, the young people were concerned about being isolated from mainstream society due to their restricted networks with South Koreans. These concerns were extended to the future when they would enter a university and mingle with South Korean peers. They were anticipating the difficulties that they might face during the process of becoming integrated into South Korean society. Nevertheless, they were willing to bridge social capital with South Koreans, particularly in natural settings, rather than teacher-led or school-organised settings. The young people felt success and useful when participating in community work or playing a meaningful role within the schools. The necessity of having a South Korean mentor was also raised by the young people; only one participant reported a feeling of satisfaction on his mentorship while others felt a deficiency in having a South Korean mentor. In terms of social links, the young people accessed social services relatively easily and acquired useful information on support for North Korean refugees mainly through teachers at alternative schools, compared to those enrolled in general schools. On the other hand, the acquisition of social links

‘through teachers’ at alternative schools sometimes caused the young refugees to feel discriminated. Going forward beyond becoming integrated into South Korean society, young North Korean refugees in this study were eager to live as ordinary young persons like other South Korean peers. In this sense, it was understood by the young people to be a challenge that they were classified as ‘refugee students’ enrolled at ‘special schools for young North Korean refugees’.

In terms of the emotional domain, the issues of trauma were largely linked to the challenges and successes that the young people experienced in alternative school settings. The trauma of the young people still influenced their current life but was also linked to worries about the future. Therefore, this study argued that the complexity inherent in the trauma issues of the young people needs to be considered when addressing their integration. In alternative school settings, the young people were encouraged to recover from trauma and learn resilience with the help of teachers, as well as with the support programmes offered by the schools. The strong bonds and sense of belonging to the schools that they had at alternative schools were also helpful in alleviating the effects of trauma on the young people, although an individual’s trauma sometimes caused troubles in friendship with other North Korean refugee students at alternative schools. Most participants, though not all, tried to develop their own strategies to cope with adversities and recover from the impacts of trauma. The young people understood the challenges that they had faced or were facing as a process that they were going through to reach a better future. They also tried to overcome the difficulties by themselves rather than asking for help from their teachers, even though they admitted that teachers made efforts to help and support refugee students at alternative schools. This was influenced by the young people’s recognition of the workload of the teachers. They tended to be reluctant to talk to teachers about their private and deep concerns in order not to add to extra work for the teachers, even though they felt grateful for, and valued the teachers’ hard work for them.

The fourth question of the study examines how alternative schools help or hinder young North Korean refugees’ integration into South Korean society. This question was considered while addressing the first three questions, but also, in particular,

discussing the findings of the study in chapter 7. In the light of the findings from the three alternative schools, as already noted, I argued that alternative schools help young North Korean refugees to become integrated into South Korean society by practising a holistic caring approach encompassing education but also accommodation, future career planning, and physical and psychological well-being. This can be one of the distinctive advantages of alternative schools, compared to mainstream schools where academic development is principally considered as a priority. Of course, this does not mean that all participants in the study were satisfied with the approaches to support offered by the schools. Nevertheless, the contributions of South Korean alternative schools to the integration of young North Korean refugees should be valued appropriately.

As previously discussed, alternative schools provided strong social bonds among young refugees and also a great sense of belonging to school as a homogenous group consisting of students from similar backgrounds. This was seen as helpful for the young refugees' integration into South Korean society, and especially for young refugees at an initial stage of adjustment. The young people felt stable and welcomed at alternative schools and also shared with each other the difficulties that they had experienced during the migration, and also those they were facing in the process of settlement into a new society. This is also identified as a difference from existing literature on young refugees in which schools are described as a place for making social networks with other students from the host country. This helpful aspect, at the same time, can be a hindrance to young North Korean refugees' social integration because they are highly likely to experience limited social connections in alternative school settings. Although social participation in community work or mentorship with a South Korean was seen as helpful, this is still very limited to only some students. In terms of the acquisition of useful information for supporting young refugees, alternative schools help the young people access and secure it relatively easily, with the help of teachers, thereby promoting their integration. However, the mechanism of information distribution mostly through teachers needs to be reviewed and adjusted to better support young refugees because they may feel discrimination, as some reported in the current study. Overall, this study argued that alternative schools have

both advantages and disadvantages in the integration of young North Korean refugees into South Korean society.

Alternative schools also help young refugees impacted by trauma to improve their physical and psychological well-being by offering specialised approaches. This was ultimately helpful for the young people's integration because they viewed achieving physical and psychological well-being as a process towards being equipped as independent citizens. The close relationships between teachers and students and among students were helpful for the young refugees to alleviate the impacts of trauma. The role of school as a protective factor for young refugees was facilitated more in alternative school settings than general school settings. Therefore, this study argued that alternative schools play a positive role in the integration of young refugees by helping them recover from trauma. While the alternative schools had advantages in practising trauma-informed approaches for young refugees, the necessity of improvement in some respects also emerged in the study in order to help and support refugee students impacted by trauma.

Contributions to knowledge

This study has made several important contributions to knowledge. This research is the first in the field of study on young North Korean refugees that has adopted the concept of young people as social agents and has explicitly emphasised the importance of listening to young people's voices. As I have already identified, there have, of course, been many qualitative research projects and also one study using Photovoice as a data collection method among earlier studies on young North Korean refugees. Prior to this study, however, it was hard to find a study in which young refugees' participation was actively encouraged during the research in a South Korean research context. In this sense, my study contributes to extending the knowledge of the field of research with young refugees by introducing the perceptions of young people as social actors and active participants and emphasising the necessity and importance of listening to young people, particularly for Korean researchers who are likely to be familiar with somewhat traditional approaches led by adult researchers.

In addition, the useful insights gained from the detailed description of ethical and methodological issues in this thesis may be of assistance to other researchers who work with young refugees. In particular, the discussion of ethical research involving children and young people is still at an early stage in Korea, both theoretically and practically. This study, therefore, contributes to providing a comprehensive understanding of ethical research with young North Korean refugees, but it also offers practical suggestions that researchers can consider and apply in their research context.

As mentioned at the start of the study, alternative education for young North Korean refugees is still an under-researched area. Therefore, this study contributes to existing knowledge on education for young North Korean refugees by providing a comprehensive overview of young refugees' experiences of alternative schools. This study also contributes to expanding our understanding of young North Korean refugees' lives, as well as schooling in a new society, by highlighting the challenges and successes they face in alternative school settings. Therefore, the young refugees' experiences that we have identified in this study assist in our understanding of the role of alternative schools for their integration into South Korean society.

In addition, so far in Korea, young North Korean refugees have tended to be viewed as a group of young people with special needs, rather than regarding them as 'refugees'. Accordingly, there has been a lack of comparison with studies on refugees escaping from and residing in other countries, and the use of various theoretical frameworks to understand young refugees in existing literature, while a specific field of research on those young people has been constructed. In this sense, this study has gone some way towards developing knowledge and understanding of young North Korean refugees by discussing their experiences in alternative school settings in the light of the frameworks of social theories and previous studies on young refugees from other countries. At the same time, the findings of the special features of young North Korean refugees residing in South Korea that this study offers provide useful insights into studies on other young refugees in Western societies.

In this study, a wide range of discussion topics were derived from the findings, while acknowledging that each of the findings and discussions still needs to be investigated and discussed more deeply and widely. This is both the limitation and also the potential of the study that can be extended towards further work. In this sense, I am convinced that this study lays the groundwork for future research, not only on young North Korean refugees, but also other young refugees in a wider context.

Recommendations for future research, practice and policy

This study provides valuable insights for future research, and for practice and policy for young people from refugee backgrounds, including young North Korean refugees. As mentioned, the current study offers the possibility of being extended towards a wide range of research topics for further investigation.

This study has been conducted with 12 young North Korean refugees from various backgrounds of age, gender, length of enrolment at school and settlement in South Korea, as well as experiences of previous education and migration. It would be difficult to argue that I could obtain rich and meaningful data through the differences and similarities of this group, as I had small numbers of each variable. The small number is a limitation in one sense, of course, but it is a strength in another, because I have achieved a depth of the data through the holistic analysis I have developed by concentrating on this small group. Nevertheless, several questions still remain to be answered. For instance, it was seen in the current study that the length of school enrolment in school or the stage of settlement in South Korea influenced the school experiences of the young people. Moving forward, further research could be conducted to examine how this factor of ‘length’ or ‘stage’ influences young North Korean refugees in defining and valuing the role of alternative schools and teachers in their lives, and also the impact of relationships between teachers and students or among students. Here, if the needs analysis of young North Korean refugees based on the ‘length’ or ‘stage’ were added, the further work would be of great help in developing a holistic support model for young North Korean refugees.

A focus on gender impact would also produce interesting findings. This study found that there were gender differences, for example, between female and male participants in their different ways of expressing their vulnerabilities and also in approaches to the treatment of students among teachers. However, there were only four male participants in this study, and the gender impact of teachers was not explicitly explored as a main aim of the study. Therefore, future investigation focusing on the gender issue is strongly recommended.

The current study used ‘social capital’ as a key theoretical lens for understanding the social aspects of integration of young North Korean refugees. Although this study identified the role of alternative schools in forming the social bonds among young North Korean refugees, this could also be a fruitful area for further work. For example, the bonding social capital among students at alternative schools after graduation needs to be investigated; how it is maintained, or strengthened or weakened, or how it changes over time. This could help further examine how schools affect the social bonds of the young refugees. While this study also identified the lack of social connections with South Koreans in alternative school settings, I also suggested, on the basis of the research findings, that mentorship with a South Korean and social participation in community work could be a possible way of bridging social capital with South Koreans in a natural setting. Therefore, further work needs to be done to examine the feasibility of this idea and to develop and implement it as a school programme.

In this study, the ‘teacher’ emerged as one of the key elements determining the role of alternative schools in the integration of young North Korean refugees. As previously mentioned, it was seen by the young people in the study that teachers played a wide range of roles outside, as well as inside school, and maintained closer relationships with students, compared to mainstream schools. Despite the unique features of alternative school teachers, there has been little research on them. Therefore, future research on teachers in alternative education settings, for example, studying the workload, working environment, initial education and qualifications, and continuing professional development of teachers, should be undertaken to improve the quality of education for young North Korean refugees.

Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the young people's voices certainly improve our understandings of alternative education for young North Korean refugees. In a similar way, this study recommends listening to North Korean refugee students' voices on the state-offered support in mainstream school settings as well. This would contribute to practising better education and support at mainstream schools. This study also obtained useful information from six participants who had previously experienced mainstream schools. Therefore, future work could be extended to comparing the two different school settings or exploring possibilities of collaborative relationships and work between alternative schools and mainstream schools.

The findings of the study also have several important recommendations for future practice and policy. This study, first of all, calls for a shift in the view of young North Korean refugees. It is true that the focus on the vulnerabilities and adversities of the young people has been helpful and useful in developing support programmes and policies for young refugees so far. However, a new perception of these young people, focusing on their potential and resilience, needs to be introduced to establish equal relationships and form ordinary friendships between young people from the two Koreas, and thereby to satisfy the young refugees' need for life as an ordinary person in South Korean society. This change in the way young North Korean refugees are viewed is recommended to educators in school settings but also policy makers, researchers, media and ordinary young people and adults in South Korea.

Another practical recommendation is that alternative schools need to develop further practice for young North Korean refugees to build more social connections with South Koreans. As previously discussed, the findings of the study show that the young people were eager and willing to mingle with South Koreans, even though they anticipated the possible challenges they would face while building the social networks. This was, at the same time, pointed out as a disadvantage of alternative schools by the young people. In addition, existing literature argues that social connections with people from the host country help promote the young refugees' integration into society but also their resilience. Here, this study suggests practical implications in developing the ways of building young North Korean refugees' social

networks with South Koreans in the light of the findings of the study. Alternative schools are recommended to develop the school curriculum aiming to increase social participation of North Korean refugee students, for example, by offering the opportunity to take part in a variety of community work. Mentoring programmes with South Korean adults need to be extended to more students at the institutional level. This study had only one young man who had a South Korean mentor. He met the mentor in a book club organised by a local company, not his school. Therefore, the necessity and importance of South Korean mentors needs to be considered as a priority in the practice of education for young North Korean refugees. This study also recommends providing more opportunities through which refugee students can make natural friendships with South Korean peers. To promote the practice of these three approaches – participation in community work, mentorship with South Korean adults, and natural friendships with South Korean peers – it would be an essential next step that alternative schools work collaboratively with local communities or mainstream schools. By doing so, alternative schools could enhance the integration of young North Korean refugees into South Korean society ‘over the fence’ of the school.

So far, there has been little discussion about the possibilities and practices of co-working between alternative schools and mainstream schools, or between alternative schools and local communities or institutions, or even among alternative schools themselves. In other words, research, policy and practice of education for young North Korean refugees tend to focus on individual schools and institutions. Accordingly, relevant data, information, programmes and policies seem to be somewhat fragmented and disconnected from each other. To develop a holistic integration approach for young refugees, collaborative work among different sectors should be considered as essential by school staff, but also researchers, policy makers and administrators in the field of education for young North Korean refugees.

At the structural level, this study suggests that improvements in the management systems and funding resources of alternative schools are needed to practise better education. Currently, alternative schools seem to be somewhat distant from support and supervision by the state. Accordingly, more burdens on school management as

well as education tend to be added to school staff, and the job security of alternative school teachers also could be affected by the current situation. The problem is, according to the findings of this study, that the workload and poor working conditions perceived by students may have a negative influence on the quality of teacher-student relationships. Therefore, the speciality of the role of alternative school teachers and their efforts for North Korean refugee students should be valued and rewarded in an appropriate way.

At the same time, alternative schools are recommended to develop as educational institutions which are more specialised and professionalised for young refugees with special academic, social and emotional needs. To do this, the state and local authorities are recommended to provide more support for alternative schools, not merely regarding them as just ‘alternatives’ to mainstream schools. This would include an increase in financial support but also the development and implementation of initial and continuing education and support for teachers, so that teachers can have expertise in educating young refugees.

Additionally, this study suggests that alternative schools should develop more ways and opportunities to improve positive attitudes towards young North Korean refugees among South Koreans, in order to enhance the integration of the young people. In light of the positive feedback from the South Korean audience, although it was a small-scale exhibition, the public photo exhibition organised in the current study appeared to play a role as a way of presenting the potential of the young refugees to South Koreans and thereby leading to changes in their views of North Korean refugees. I also recommend that mainstream schools need to take part in improving their awareness of students from refugee backgrounds by working collaboratively with alternative schools.

Closing statement

This study has examined the role of alternative schools for young North Korean refugees’ integration by exploring 12 participants’ experiences of alternative schools.

I started this study from my personal interest in young North Korean refugees and have finally reached the closing stage of the study.

The capital city of South Korea is only three hours away by car from the capital city of North Korea. However, it took a long and hazardous time for the 12 young people in this study to arrive in South Korea. They are refugees, but ‘special refugees’ to South Koreans as well as to me, because Koreans were originally neighbours or relatives of each other in ‘one Korea’, around 70 years ago. The young people experienced a range of traumatic experiences for no other reason than the fact that they were born in the North.

The number of young North Korean refugees does not seem to be large compared to other young refugees at the international level. However, they should be seen as a key population in South Korea in a number of respects: they could be seen as informants that could testify to young people’s lives in North Korea and migration experiences in transit countries; as a barometer that could measure the progress of the integration among people from different backgrounds in South Korea; and as a bridge that could connect the two Koreas by enhancing mutual understanding of each other. School could be, and should be, a place where young North Korean refugees can demonstrate and develop their abilities and potential so that the young people are prepared to play these key roles in South Korean society.

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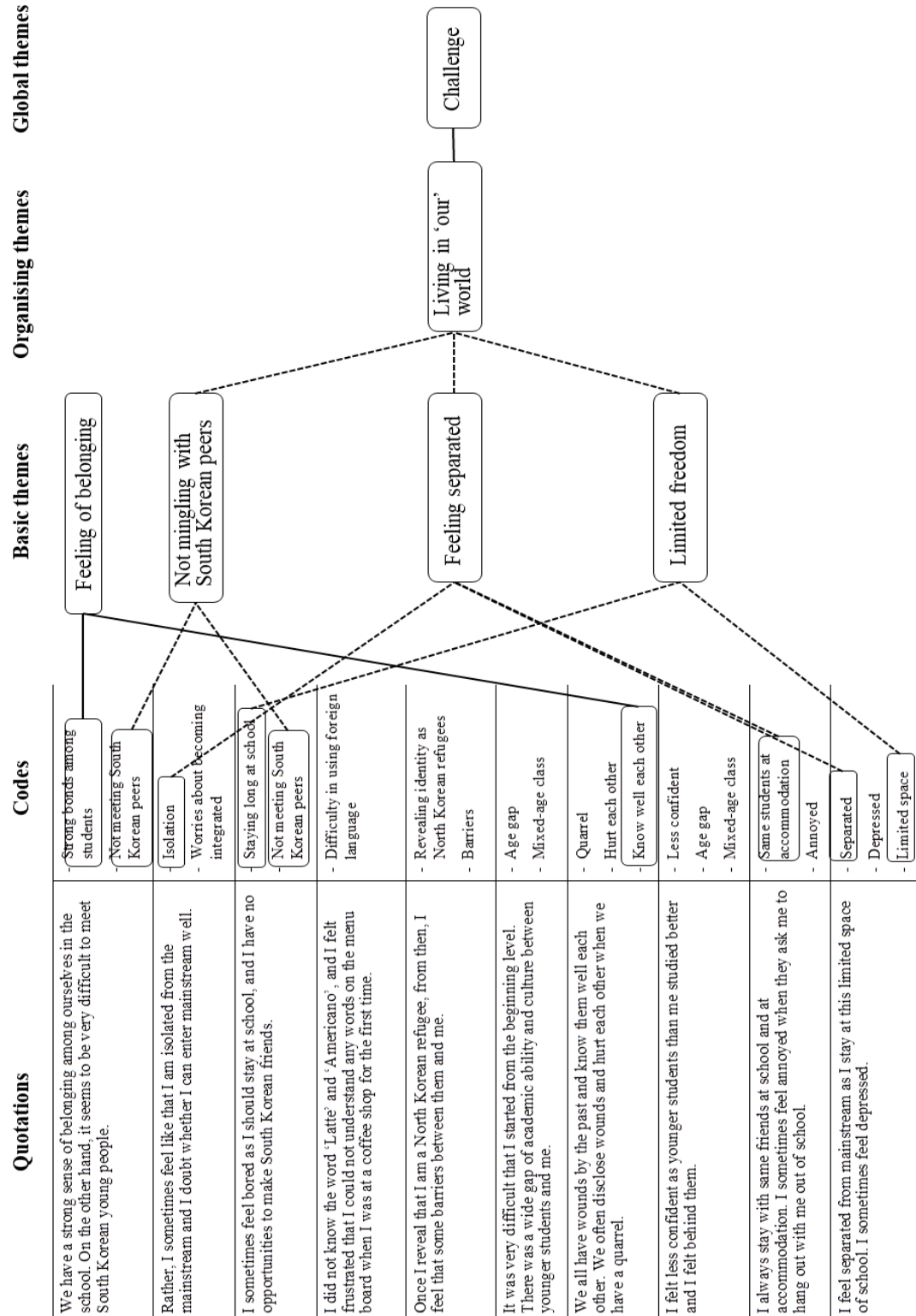
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Appendices

Appendix 1 Example of coding and extracting themes



Appendix 2 Ethical approval



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Moray House School
of Education

Research & Knowledge Exchange
Moray House School of Education
The University of Edinburgh
Old Moray House
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ
D/D +44 (0)131 651 6388
S/B +44 (0)131 650 1000
www.ed.ac.uk

Sujin Yoon
Room 1.10
Thomson's Land

13 October 2016

Dear Sujin

Title: North Korean refugee students' successes and challenges in alternative school settings

The School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee has now considered your request for ethical approval for the studies detailed in the your application.

This is to confirm that the Sub-Committee is happy to approve the application and that the research meets the School Ethics Level 4 criterion. This is defined as "applies to research which is potentially problematic in that it may incorporate an inherent physical or emotional risk to researchers or participants; involve covert surveillance or covert data collection; or includes research studies in the NHS involving humans, their tissue and/or data".

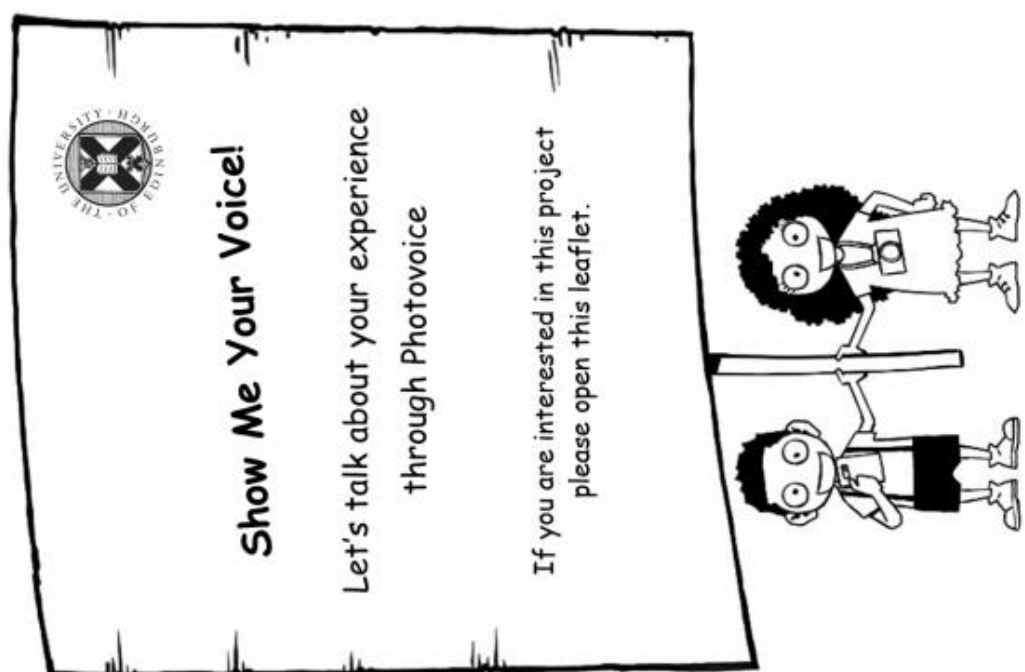
You are reminded that if the research changes in anyway from that described on your application form, you may need to re-apply for approval.

Should you receive any formal complaints relating to the study you should notify the MHSE Ethics Committee immediately by email to Shona Cunningham at s.cunningham@ed.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely


Dr Ailsa Niven
Convener, School Ethics Sub-Committee

Appendix 3 Information leaflet about the study



Thank you very much for reading this leaflet!

Any comments about this project are always welcome.

If you would like any further information or have a question, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Sujin Yoon

Maray House School of Education

University of Edinburgh

Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ

Telephone: +44 (0)7478 299301 (UK)

+82 10 3350 5171 (Korea)

Email: sujin.yoon@ed.ac.uk

Listening to North Korean refugee students' school experiences through Photovoice

Who are you?

My name is Sujin Yoon and I am currently doing research as a PhD student under the supervision of Dr Gillean McCluskey and Dr Deborah Fry in the Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, UK.

Why are you doing the project?

The aim of this project is to explore North Korean refugee students' successes and challenges within alternative school settings. I would like to learn about your school experiences not only in terms of academic performance but also more holistically. I also would like to give you the opportunity to tell your views and opinions through photographs taken by yourself and through talking with other students and me. I hope to find a way to support North Korean young refugees better through this project.

What is the Photovoice?

If you agree to participate in the research project, called "Photovoice", you will do the following activities.

- Taking Photos - You will have the opportunity to take photos about your school experiences.
- Selecting Photos – You will select meaningful photos that can express your views well.
- Group discussion – You will have a discussion of the key photos that you have chosen with other students.
- One-to-one interview – You will talk about your school experiences in more detail.

★ You can use your own digital camera or smartphone camera, but a second-hand camera is available to you upon request. This project will be carried out in only Korean.

★ When you take part in the photo task, you can choose one-to-one activity if you prefer it, or you can make a group with 2-3 trusted friends if you feel uncomfortable or uneasy about one-to-one settings.

Who can participate in the project?

In order to participate in this project, you are now a student enrolled in secondary education course of alternative schools or finished the course recently.

Where and when will this project be carried out?

This project would be run from October 2016 to February 2017. We will choose specific time and places in considering your safety and accessibility. Interviews or group discussions would be carried out within school settings but we can meet at a quiet cafe or a seminar room in a local library if you want another place, not your school. The specific place, date and time for the project will be decided after we discuss together at the initial meeting.

What will happen with the photos and accounts that I provide?

I will use your photos and accounts for my PhD thesis and other possible publications. All data including photos will be stored securely using password protection. You can have access to recording files and transcribed materials of what you have produced in the project.

Can I stop talking or participating in the project?

If you feel discomfort or stress when you encounter sensitive topics that you are reluctant to talk about, you do not need to talk about them. If you change your mind about talking to me, you can tell me anytime. You can also stop participating in the study at any time that you want to without giving any specific reasons.

Can you protect my privacy?

I will make every effort to protect your privacy. Any photos and accounts that you make in the project will be confidential and I will not use them without your consent. I will not tell anyone, including your parents and teachers, what you have said in the project. Your personal information and specific details that can make you identifiable will be anonymised and not be disclosed in any publications or presentations.

How can the project benefit me?

You can reflect on your own school life and discover your strengths as well as challenges. This experience may help you draw a positive picture of your future. You also have the opportunity to improve confidence and social skills by doing group activities with others. All participants will be given a photo-book filled with your own pictures taken in the project as appreciation for your contribution, but there will be not payment for your participation.

Appendix 4 Informed consent form



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Participant Consent Form

If you agree with the statements, please tick the boxes below.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the leaflet on the research project. ☐
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent for participation in the project at any time without giving any reason. ☐
3. I understand that the individual interview and group discussion will be audio-recorded and transcribed for use as part of the project. ☐
4. I understand that individual interview and group discussion will be confidential. ☐
5. I understand that if child protection issues are disclosed then my guidance teacher will be informed who will take necessary action. ☐
6. I understand that I will not be identifiable from the data. I agree that the information shared by me with the researcher will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis and in publications or presentations. ☐
7. I understand that I will not be identifiable from the data. I agree that the photos shared by me with the researcher will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis and in publications or presentations. ☐

If you are happy to take part, please sign below.

_____ Name of Participant	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Name of Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

Parent consent

- I understand the purpose of this research project.
- I understand that this study will be carried out within school settings and there will be prior notice if there is any change of place for the study.
- I agree that the individual interview and group discussion will be confidential.
- I understand that my child can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

I am happy for _____ (name of child) to take part in the project.

Name of parent/Guardian _____ Signature _____

Appendix 5 Information sheet of supporting services

Helpful websites and phone numbers

If you have something that is troubling you...

- **North Korea Youth Support Centre**

<http://www.hub4u.or.kr>

Counselling call 02 3414 0111

- **Rainbow youth centre**

<http://www.rainbowyouth.or.kr>

Counselling call 02 722 2585

If you are worried about abuse or you need urgent help...

- **National Child Protection Agency**

<http://www.korea1391.org>

Emergency call 112

- **Seoul Metropolitan Counselling and Welfare Centre for Youth**

<http://www.teen1318.or.kr>

Emergency call 1388 (freephone)



Appendix 6 Interview schedule

Name		Date of birth	
Place		Time	

Interview schedule for North Korean refugee students

Introduction: I will talk about what the participant is doing now, their likes and dislikes, and any other relevant personal information.

Anonymity: I will make it clear to the participant that they will not be identified in the report(s), while emphasising the importance I attach to telling their story. I will mention the use of a code name, which should be the participant's choice. If they cannot think of one straight away return to this at the end of the interview.

Confidentiality: I will make it clear that everything that is said in the interview is confidential unless there is a child protection issue, in which case I will talk to the participant about the best person to share this information with.

Permission to record: I will ask permission to record the interview in order that I can have a record of exactly what they have said when I come to write my thesis. I want to use their exact words, but the code name the participants give me will be used to preserve anonymity.

Time for questions: I will give the participant an opportunity to ask any questions.

The order of the interview: The interview will start with general questions about the participant's current circumstances, and talk about the photos that they have taken, followed by the participant's view and experience of alternative school. It then goes on to talk about how to the participant deal with challenges and successes in their school setting. Lastly, we will talk about how alternative school help or hinder their integration into South Korean society. These questions by the researcher will be asked to the participant naturally, prompting the participant's talk for making meaning of photos. The order of the interview questions would be used **flexibly** depending on the participant's response and reaction.

Probes: Probes are responsive and thus I need to use not only verbal probes but also non-verbal probes such as a pause, a gesture, a raised eyebrow.

Part 1: Start the interview (Factual questions)

The aim here is to make the participant comfortable, by talking about their everyday lives. I can also show them the fact that I am interested in the participant themselves, not my research topic.

1. How are you feeling today?

2. What is the most memorable (or impressive) thing in your daily life for the last few weeks?

 Prompt about the participant's daily life

3. How was your experience of taking photographs in your school for the last (few) weeks?

 Probe: How did the photo-taking activity affect your life? (Positively and negatively)

4. When did you enter South Korea? How long have you been in South Korea?

5. How long have you been in this school?

 Probe: Can you tell me about your schooling history?

6. Who do you live with?

Part 2: Make the meaning of the photos

In this part, participants will be asked to share the photos that they have taken and selected, and make the meaning and significance of the photos. The questions in part 3 below can be asked to participants implicitly here.

1. Tell me about this picture.

 If necessary, Probe: 1) Describe your picture; 2) What is happening in your picture?; 3) Why did you take a picture of this?; 4) What does this picture tell us about your life?; 5) How can this picture provide opportunities for us to improve life? *These probing questions are designed for photo-elicitation by Hussey (2006).

2. Why did you decide to show me this picture?

3. Which photo do you want to share with other participants in the group discussion?

Part 3: Participant's school experiences

These questions below aim to elicit information about the participant's school experiences based on the research questions. I will try to ask these questions implicitly during the photo-elicitation process (Part 2), but they can be asked explicitly in a separate part as follows.

Q: What are young refugees' experiences and views of alternative schools?

1. What are you doing now during the day, Monday to Friday in your school?

Probe for school course, programme, and activity that they are in now.

Probe for views (negative and positive) about what they are doing.

2. Why did you choose the alternative school instead of regular school?

Q: How do they understand and experience challenges in their school settings?

1. What kinds of changes have you experienced in your life after entering this school?

Probe: How long have you been involved in this school?

2. Have you had any problems since you started at this school? (Including the present)

Probe: What kinds of difficulties have you experienced in the school?

Can you tell me about your feeling when you experienced the difficulty?

How did you overcome the difficulty?

What (or Who) helped you to overcome the difficulty?

How did this experience change you (or your life)?

What do these experiences mean to you?

Q: How do they understand and experience successes in their school settings?

1. What does mean 'success' in your school experiences?

Probe: What kinds of successes have you experienced in the school?

How did you feel when you experienced the success?

How did this experience change you (or your life)?

How did this experience affect you (or your life)?

What do these experiences mean to you?

Q: How does alternative school help or hinder their integration into South Korean society?

1. What do you think of the staff at your school?

Probe: What does the teacher-student relationship mean to you?

How do you think about the quality of the relationship?

How the teacher(s) (or staff) affect you?

2. What do you think of the classmates (or friends) at your school?

Probe for the meaning and quality of the relationships, and how they affect them.

Probe: What does the student-student relationship mean to you?

How do you think about the quality of the relationship?

How the classmate(s) (or friends) affect you?

3. How the alternative school affect your adjustment to and settlement in South Korean society?

After positive response,

Probe: How the school help you to adjust to and settle in South Korean society?

How the school help you to improve your academic, social, and emotional development?

After negative response,

Probe: Why do you think the school does not help your adjustment to and settlement in South Korean society?

Why do you think the school does not help you to improve Academic, social, and emotional development?

4. Will you recommend other young refugees from North Korea to choose alternative schools instead of regular school?

Probe for why or why not.

Q: For the future

1. Do you feel the necessity of any other help or support for you to do better?

Probe: What kinds of help or support do you need more?

2. What would you like to do in the future, once you have left school?

Part 4: Concluding the interview

I will make an arrangement of on-going session and explain about next session. It would be important to have time to answer any questions raised by the participant during the interview.

I will express that I have really enjoyed seeing your pictures and talking with you. Thank you very much for joining this interview. I would like to keep in touch until we meet again.

1. Do you have any questions?
2. Is there anything else you would like to talk about before we wrap things up?
3. What do you think is the best way of doing that?

Probe for most appropriate means

Texting

Mobile phone calls

Face-to-face meeting

Email

Other SNS

Appendix 7 Summary of key findings and discussions

Discussion topics	Key underpinning findings	Key arguments, suggestions & recommendations
Views of integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most participants viewed integration as a one-way process while one had a view of integration as a two-way process. - The understandings of integration were chiefly related to social aspects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Future research on the use of the terms 'integration' and 'inclusion' in North Korean refugee studies is recommended. - Further studies on what factors affect young North Korean refugees to have a view of the integration as a one-way process are recommended.
Functional aspects of integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The experiences of alternative schools were categorised into four areas: education, future career, accommodation, and well-being. - The school experiences of the four areas, consistent with the functional aspects of integration, were understood as a process of preparing for integration. - These aspects of functional integration were regarded as a preparation for social integration. - Alternative schools in this study offered appropriate education for the young refugees to develop academic ability but also social understandings and this was seen as helpful. - The schools also provided support for accommodation, preparation for future career, and physical and psychological well-being. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternative schools help young North Korean refugees to become integrated into South Korean society by providing appropriate education. - Further investigations on North Korean refugee students' voices on the state-offered support in general school settings are recommended. - Alternative schools are helpful for the integration of the young refugees by practising a holistic caring approach, while general schools principally focus on students' academic development. - South Korean general schools should recognise the worth of a holistic approach for students with refugee backgrounds and develop programmes or school policy to practise it. - The contribution of alternative schools to the integration of young North Korean refugees should be valued appropriately.
Social aspects of integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The young people acquired and strengthened bonding social capital at alternative schools. - Social bonds with other young refugees at alternative schools were helpful, especially, for their initial settlement by providing strong sense of belonging to school and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternative schools play a role as a kind of community association, beyond educational institutions, strengthening social bonds among young refugees. - Social bonds among young refugees at alternative schools help the young people's integration. - Further research on the bonding social capital after young refugees' graduation

	<p>forming a bond of empathies among young refugees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The young people at the same time had difficulty in making social networks with South Korean peers in alternative school settings. - The young people felt isolated from the mainstream due to a lack of social connections with South Koreans. - The young people were willing to build social bridges with South Koreans, particularly in natural settings, despite the anticipated difficulties that they may face. - The young people felt success and usefulness by playing a meaningful role such as participation to voluntary work, but this was limited in the current situations of alternative schools. - One participant had a significant relationship with a South Korean mentor. - The young people accessed relatively easily social services and acquired useful information through teachers at alternative schools, compared to those enrolled in general schools. - The young people sought to be ordinary beyond becoming integrated into South Korean society. 	<p>from alternative schools is recommended.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternative schools, as homogenous group, are likely to hinder young refugees from bridging social capital with South Korean peers and thereby promoting social integration. - The focus needs to be put on the young people's desire and willingness to overcome the difficulties and bridge social capital with South Koreans. - Social participation to community work is recommended as a good example for young refugees to improve social bridges with South Koreans. - Future studies on mentorship for young North Korean refugees are recommended. - The necessity and importance of South Korean mentors needs to be considered as a priority goal in education for young refugees. - Further investigations on the quality of the young people's relationships in alternative school settings are recommended. - Alternative schools help young refugees acquire relatively easily social links with their teacher's help. - The acquisition of social links mainly through teachers at alternative schools sometimes cause young refugees to feel discrimination. - Overall, alternative schools have both sides of advantages and disadvantages in the aspects of social integration of young North Korean refugees. - Alternative schools are recommended to take action to improve positive views toward young refugees among South Koreans and act as a bridge for mutual understanding. - Mainstream schools are recommended to work with alternative schools by interchanging useful information and appropriate approaches to educate and take care of North Korean refugee students.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media are recommended to address young refugees as normal young people rather than highlighting their adversities and vulnerabilities.
Trauma & coping strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The trauma of the young people affects their current life but is also linked to worries about their future. - The young people were encouraged to recover from trauma and promote resilience by school support programmes as well as teachers' help. - The strong bonds and sense of belonging to school helped the young people alleviate trauma effects, although this sometimes caused troubles in their friendship. - The young people tried to develop their own strategies to cope with adversities and recover from the trauma impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The complexity of young refugees' trauma needs to be considered when addressing the issues of trauma. - Alternative schools help young refugees impacted by trauma improve physical and psychological well-being by providing trauma-informed approaches. - The role of school as protective factors is more facilitated in alternative school settings than general schools settings because of the greater sense of belonging to school and closer relationships among students. - Alternative schools play a positive role in the integration of young refugees by helping them recover from trauma. - Alternative schools are recommended to develop further ways for young refugees to build more social connections with South Koreans because social bridges can act as a protective factor to promote young refugees' resilience. - While alternative schools have advantages as trauma-informed schools for young refugees, the initial education and continuing professional development for teachers at alternative schools are recommended for better support young refugees impacted by trauma.
Teachers at alternative schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers at alternative schools played a key role influencing the young people's schooling but also more general aspects of life. - The student-teacher relationships at alternative schools were closer than that at general schools. - The young people at the early stage of settlement tended to be more dependent to school teachers. - Some either experienced the authoritarian attitude of teachers or understood the role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young refugees are more likely to dependent on school teachers and South Korean teachers are more likely to have a strong influence on the refugee students. - Teachers at alternative schools play more roles for young refugees, influencing overall areas of young refugees' lives. - The wide range of roles of teachers at alternative schools should be valued appropriately. - The period or stage of adjustment or the length of enrolment may influence young refugees to define and value the role of and the relationship with teachers

	<p>of teachers mainly associated with academic work within a classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The young people viewed that the role of teachers was influenced by the religious backgrounds of teachers. - Teachers were viewed as less influential by the young people in some contexts. - The young people felt grateful and valued the teachers' hard work for them while they tended to be reluctant to talk to teachers about their private concerns in order not to add extra work to teachers. 	<p>at alternative schools. Future studies on this topic are recommended.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The close relationship between teachers and students can be one of attributes of alternative schools for young North Korean refugees. - Gender impact may exist in teacher influence. Future research on this topic is recommended. - The management system and financial structure of alternative schools and unstable working condition may have a negative influence on the role of teachers and the teacher-student relationship by weakening the influence of teachers and causing teachers' burnout. - The new type of student-teacher relationship as co-workers or collaborators, beyond a relationship between givers and takers or a relationship between subordinates and superiors, are recommended. - Future research and policy making about workload, working environment, and further development of teachers at alternative schools are recommended.
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